





600078664.



# TRICOTRIN

THE STORY OF A WAIF AND STRAY.

VOL. II.



# TRICOTRIN

## THE STORY OF A WAIF AND STRAY.

BY OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF 'STRATHMORE,' 'CHANDOS,' 'IDALIA,'  
'UNDER TWO FLAGS,' &c.

'Better an outlaw than not free.'—*Jean Paul*.

'Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed,  
... unclassed, tribeless, nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself.'—*Shelley*.

'Love, and do what you will.'—*St Augustine*.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:  
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.  
1869.

[The right of Translation is reserved.]



250. v. 311.

---

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.




# TRICOTRIN,

## THE STORY OF A WAIF AND STRAY.

---

### CHAPTER I.

HE equipage dashed off with her; and if conscience spoke, it could not be heard in the noise of the flashing, whirling, azure wheels that swept her down white roads and under green avenues through the gold and bronze gates of the actress's villa.

Coriolis could be generous, when to be so did not interfere with her own supreme selfishness. The rapt adoring face of the child had attracted her, and she had felt a fancy to see it closer. But beside these she had motives less innocent: one, on whom her own charms had palled, but whose contentment and patronage were essential to her,

had also seen that 'flower-like face' under its scarlet hood, and had bade her let him see it once more, and more closely. And Coriolis was one of those women who own but one cultus and one passion—those of gold.

Viva's heart was beating at fever heat as she followed her enchantress through the exquisite miniature palace, in which the stage-sovereign reigned. The knowledge of her own sin in coming thither, her terror for the rebuke her flight would draw down on her head, the sharp stinging sense of a criminal action that seemed to prick her like an iron goad, served yet, in some fashion, to render her ecstasy in her own transgression wilder, and sweeter, and stronger. She had done very wrong, she knew that; but she had rushed forth into perilous liberty; she had seized the forbidden fruit; she had entered into the unknown land; and she had too much of the spirit of Eve in her not to take delight in her daring deed. Moreover, glancing around on all the luxurious beauty that blinded her, she thought: 'She was unknown and penniless once, they say; why should I not become like her, too?'

In this lay Coriolis' charm for her:—that the actress was to her the incarnation of all that may be accomplished by the force of beauty alone against every antagonism of origin and of circumstance. And of the price at which such accomplishment was attained, Viva knew nothing.

‘Come in hither,’ said Coriolis, leading her into the daintiest of dressing-chambers, that made the child think of an empty bird’s nest she had once seen in an elder bush, all silvered over with glistening hoar-frost inside and out.

‘Let us look at you,’ pursued her hostess; and she remorselessly pulled off the red cloak, and shook down all Viva’s hair, talking in a pleasant little murmur like a singing-mouse all the while herself. Coriolis was a woman without any sort of mind; she was almost as absolutely brainless as any parroquet; but she knew human weaknesses well, and she knew how to flatter them; and those two forms of knowledge suffice to conquer a child. They suffice, many times, to vanquish a man.

‘Have you sent to tell him, Madame?’ asked Viva, a pang of conscience stirring amidst the bliss of her intoxicated vanity.

‘Your friend? oh, yes,’ said Coriolis; and Viva did not know that the daily bread of such women as this lies in falsehood.

Coriolis asked her all her history, and Viva told it; the sense of shame at her costume, and her homely dwelling, striving with her own conviction that she belonged to some lineage of special though hidden splendour.

Coriolis heard and laughed.

‘Ah, ha! It is always out of such as you that women like me are made.’

‘Is it?’ asked the child, breathless with hope and joy, unwitting the frightful truth that lay in the words.

‘Is it? Of course it is!’ cried her temptress. ‘The world is against us as we start, and we have our revenge; we trap it, and strip it, and make it our laughing-stock and our golden-granary both in one. You do not understand? Pooh, little one! You will learn all this fast enough. Oh, life is a pleasant thing!—you may believe that. Look here! since I—since I came on the stage have I not lived like an empress, and eaten like a Strasburg duck, and dressed like a fashion-plate, and had jewels that outshone the duchesses’ diamonds, and seen all the world turn after me as I drove or as I walked? To be sure! It is hard work at first, perhaps;—but not for a beautiful woman. I am beautiful; you will be so. When a woman can look at her face in the mirror, and say honestly, “I am handsomer than one in a million,” it is as good for her as if she said, “I am born to a crown.” Better, indeed—because it is a much gayer time that waits for her. Do you see?’

‘Yes,’ said Viva, drinking the poison in as though it were the water of life.

Coriolis believed what she said. To a creature without soul and brain, the lusts of the flesh, and the joys of the palate, and of the vanity, are all in all.

Coriolis was honest;—she enjoyed.

'Stay an instant, and you shall behold yourself as you will be,' she pursued, as she threw open the door of one of her cabinets, and pulled out laces, and silks, and velvets, and gems, till the girl's eyes were dazzled.

Viva felt none of the prescience which usually awakes in innocence that is brought into the presence of vice. There was nothing of warning mingled with the allurements exercised over her. She had no idea of aught of evil or of danger in her sorceress; she saw an exquisite thing with a cherub's face, and the power, it seemed to her, of a magician; and every one of Coriolis' movements fascinated her with a sense of wonder, attraction, and delight.

'As this woman was, she might herself be one day!'—this was the one thought that enchained her.

Laughing, and keeping up her silvery, mirthful babble that was like the ring of sleigh bells over snow, Coriolis, who had much of the infant in her and much of the fool, and who had as many caprices as a spoiled marmoset, loosened and tossed aside with disdain Viva's white linen dress, and threw over her one of her own costly trailing robes, and all the fantasy of a jewelled court costume. Her hands were quick and agile at such transformation; and she changed her in fifty seconds from a little picturesque bohemian to a magnificent young beauty; while the girl, gazing at the alteration in the

long mirrors that fronted her, touched herself to know if she were awake, and gazed, with parted lips and throbbing temples, at her own apparition.

‘There!’ cried Coriolis, laughing more and more. ‘Look there! See what Dress—the god and the devil of women—can do for you. Dress—dress! Why, child, your beauty without the aid of costume, is nothing better than the pearl before it leaves the oyster-shell. Will you go back to your shell, you pretty pearl? Not if I know aught of your heart.’

Viva made her no answer. All the self-love of Narcissus held her entranced.

‘I am as beautiful as you!’ she cried, at last, aloud, in ecstasy, throwing her arms above her head.

Coriolis turned away, with a cloud for once over her smiling azure eyes.

‘More so!’ she said, shortly, with the impulses of frankness at times natural to her. ‘More so! You have what I have lost!’

Viva did not ask what this was;—she did not inquire at the price of what loss this celebrity, and this wealth that she coveted, had been acquired. She was absorbed in contemplation of herself.

The actress looked at her, and smiled; her own passing emotion had swiftly vanished.

‘How it runs through us all!’ she cried. ‘With all the loves one has, one never loves anything like oneself! What a supreme joy it is—that knowing

oneself fair! But there is a still greater joy than that: it is to hear the world say so. Do you see, you charming bagatelle, how happy you are?—you are beautiful! You can scoff at all the Cæsars; their power is nothing to yours. To be handsome while one lives, and to die before any of *that* fades: if one can do this, one can laugh at all the priests and all the sages!’

And she laughed yet again, and Viva joined in her laugh. The airy paganism suited the child’s temper, and Coriolis was that most persuasive of proselytizers—a disciple who believed implicitly in the doctrines she inculcated. To be fair all her years through, and to die before any of ‘*that*’ waned and withered, was to Coriolis the perfection of human existence; and the only form of dread that ever weighed on this careless, thoughtless, mindless, shameless thing, was the terror that the day should ever come when she should dash her hand through her mirror in despair at the lustreless eyes, and the lined brow, and the dulled tresses it should give back to her vision.

Viva gave a deep sigh as she heard.

‘Ah!’ she murmured, ‘if I could only have ten years of a life like yours I should be content!—’

‘To resign it? Not you. Little one,—when we have tasted triumph we have fed on a fruit of Olympus, that makes all mortal food flavourless, and leaves us with a cruel craving appetite, never still!’

Coriolis had heard a poet say this : and used the answer, as one picturesque and likely to be persuasive to this young listener and tyro.

‘What matter!’ cried Viva, in the magnificent recklessness of ignorance. ‘I would rather taste it once and hunger for ever, than never know its flavour all the days of my life!’

Coriolis, with a curious fancy for this daring, vain, lovely creature, who made her think of her own childhood, laid both hands on Viva’s shoulder, and looked at her with a gaze that was more earnest than her volatile, sparkling, wandering eyes had ever given.

‘Are you too good for it?’ she murmured to herself. ‘No. Not a whit. You are just what I was ;—cleverer perhaps, and of more wit, but just like me. You would only break an honest man’s heart, if you were to begin with one : it is better to commence as you will end, with pillaging fools and knaves. Pooh ! you don’t understand,’ she cried aloud, with all her gaiety. ‘You are a little simpleton. Listen ; I will put you on the stage. You will have talent, I can see. If you have not it will matter nothing. Walk well, dress superbly, do strange things, the odder the better, and with your features you can make your fortune, though you can say no more than a squeaking doll at a fair.’

‘But I want to be *great*!’ cried Viva, dissatisfied with her future prospects.

‘Nonsense ! When a woman passes down through a crowd, and the people look back after her and call out, “that is *she* !” has she not greatness, the best greatness ? Some Latin idiot says, they have told me, that the “pointing finger” is no sure sign we are great—Ridiculous ! When it points *our* way we may be pretty sure we are on the high road to fame. Besides, “great, great, great !” What does that matter ? What matters in this world is to eat and drink well, and dance, and play, and laugh, and see others perish in envy of us, and have more gold than we can take up in both our hands, and enjoy ourselves while we are living. That is what matters. And no one can do all those better than a beautiful woman. Now go you in there, and wait till I come to you. I will not be long.’

She pushed Viva gently through a door that opened into a small cabinet, and closed the door upon her. It had been very late in the day when she had met the actress ; it was now evening ; the little chamber was softly lit, and full of the perfume of flowers and the luxuries of wealth. Viva dropped down on a couch and wondered whether she were awake or dreaming ; a sense of fear and a great remorse stole on her ; she knew she had done wickedly, and a vague indefinable dread of some unknown evil came over her. She began to grieve for her disobedience, and to long to be safe in the

little attic with Tricotrin. What would he say ! what would he think !

Her throat swelled ; she felt as if she must scream out loud ; even the elegance and the fragrance of the place added to its strangeness and her own fears :—instinctively her hand wandered over the rich silk of her robe, and her eyes watched the glisten of its gold embroideries, seeking consolation in these. They brought a certain solace.

‘If I could only wear them always !’ she thought : and the vision of herself upon the stage, before the world, covered with flowers, welcomed with tumults of applause, intoxicating multitudes with her grace and her glance in all the triumph that she had seen attained by Coriolis, arose before her, and numbed all her repentance.

The desire to be ‘great’ possessed her : when that insatiate passion enters a living soul, be it the soul of a woman-child dreaming of a coquette’s conquests, or a crowned hero craving for a new world, it becomes blind to all else. Moral death falls on it ; and any sin looks sweet that takes it nearer to its goal. It is a passion that generates at once all the loftiest and all the vilest things, which, between them, ennoble and corrupt the world ; even as heat generates at once the harvest and the maggot, the purpling vine and the lice that devour it. It is a passion without which the world would decay in darkness, as it would do with-

out heat; yet to which, as to heat, all its filthiest corruption is due.

‘I shall be great!’ thought Viva, to whom the greatness of the stage looked as the greatness of an empire: and remorse ceased to touch her. They must suffer that she might ascend:—this was the reckless reasoning of the human and female egotism within her.

A flood of light startled her as the door was flung open, and Coriolis entered; freshly arrayed, and with her fair feathery hair lying lightly on her shoulders, diademed with flowers and with gems. She floated to the child with her soft swift undulating movement—the movement of the born *almàh*, in whom motion is poetry, and in whose limbs lies eloquence.

‘Thou art in the twilight, little one!’ she cried, using the familiar and caressing ‘thou’ for the first time. ‘Come; I have a better light for thee than that; and one in which there are eager eyes to behold thee. Come!’

‘Where?’ asked the tempted one, with wistful wonder.

Coriolis smiled a little bitterly.

‘Hush! We never ask “where” in *our* world,

On va où va toute chose

Où va le laurier et la rose!’

And she drew the girl from the chamber, with her

soft, white, dimpled hand clasped on Viva, as though it were a glove of steel.

The roses had all cankers at their cores, and poisoned the lips that kissed them ; the laurels were all twined in with thorns, which drew blood from the brows that they wreathed :—what of that ? Cankerless roses die also ; and there are no laurels whose fruit is sweet.

She led an unsoiled creature in its ignorance to perdition : but she did not think so : vice was fair in her own sight, and the devil of gold was her god—a good god who enriched those that served him : she thought she could do no better than bring a neophyte to believe in her cultus, and serve in her temple.

‘Enjoy—enjoy—enjoy,’ her heart had whispered in her own childhood, when she had sat on the lonely sea-shore, and longed for a world that was unknown : and she had enjoyed, and it seemed well to her still, and the sole thing that it was worth while for a mortal to do. In tossing the fruit of desire into the child’s young bosom, she only gave that which had been luxuries to her own lips, and which seemed to her still the one apple of life worth the plucking. She was wicked, because things all sense and no soul must be so ; but she was honest, and she only led where she herself had ever gone, with tuneful swift feet, rejoicing.

‘Evil, be thou my good,’ she had said, in her fair,

wanton, indolent, careless fashion, and evil had been her good; it had served her well, heaped wealth on her, made the air she lived in full of laughter, and the lovers she sought facile to their yoke, and the years that flew over her head, sunlit and short and radiant with mirth. Evil had been prodigal of gifts and graces to her, and had recompensed her as kings recompense; she deemed that there was no better master upon earth. Virtue was a niggard tyrant, who left his servitors to starve: but Evil was a prince, who scattered gold and flowers with both hands.

There be those who in their gilded shame feel  
the shrinking scornful passion, at their own fall, of  
the poet's Egyptian harlot,

What is Life without Honour?  
And what can the life that I live  
Give to me I shall care to continue, not caring for aught it can  
give?  
I, despising the fools that despise me,—a plaything not pleasing  
myself,  
Whose life for the pelf that maintains it, must sell what is paid  
not by pelf!  
And the fancies of men change. And bitterly bought is the  
bread that I eat,  
For, though purchased with body and spirit, when purchased,  
'tis yet all unsweet.'

But there be also many others in whom this  
sting of scorn is dead, this ache of conscience is

lulled to rest by the opiates of vanity and of pleasure ; there be those to whom the life that they lead looks the best life, and to whom licence is precious, to whom enjoyment is the Alpha and Omega of existence, and to whom the chime of golden coinage is the only music of the spheres.

And Coriolis was one of these. She had been very weary, and fretful as a caged bird, in innocence ; in vice she rejoiced and was free ! A future might come indeed when she would perish of famine on the stones of the streets :—what of that ? They must have some soul in them who dread a future ; and there was no soul in this gay airy thing, though her dancing feet trod the souls of men down and killed them.

Like Dorat she had gathered every flower except the Immortelle : and the one that she had passed over she never missed.

Immortality !—the word is ridiculous named in the same breath with such things as Coriolis ; what has eternity to do with women such as this, too foul for heaven and too frail for hell ?

She led the child through dusky fragrant passages, aromatic in odour, with the sheen of silk and satin glimmering in the shadow from their walls.

Then she drew back, and sweeping aside a curtain that hung before an arched and opened door, motioned to Viva to pass within before her.

It was the entrance to a banqueting-room.

Viva, touched for the first time with a chill of timidity, a throb of fear, hung back, wistful yet longing.

Through the arch of the gilded portal there were a blaze of light, a glisten of rose colour, a splendour of gold, a wilderness of flowers, an odour of wines and spices and burnt incense, a gay laughter from young men's throats, that all blazed and whirled together upon the girl's wondering eyes and ears.

She paused, hesitating and half frightened, before that paradise of forbidden evil.

'Is it a temple?' she murmured breathlessly.

Coriolis laughed; a more cruel laugh than any that had rung from her mocking lips.

'A temple! yes! Go in,—and worship our god.'

And she thrust the child through the opening.



## CHAPTER II.



T was towards the close of the day when Tricotrin returned.

He was tired out, heated, exhausted ; as his habit was when in pain, he had wandered far, walking on and on through the open country, seeking solitude on the same impulse as the stricken stag. In the red woods of the late autumn, in the wide fields, with their arc of purple angry sky, in the bleak plains swept by equinoctial gales, he could breathe, think, resolve, kill passion in him, and call back his strength. In joy, this Arab little loved the oppression of cities, the pent confines of chambers, the close atmosphere of crowded roofs ; in suffering, they maddened him. They were like the bars of his den to a caged lion whom his gaolers wound and taunt.

By evening-fall he returned ; the linnet had

ceased to sing under its plume of lime; the sunbeams had ceased to play through the little brown dusky street; in the doorway stood the woman of the house looking up and down, with her head on one side like a robin's, and the bright dress of her native Basque province glowing in the shade like a poppy growing out of a pile of black timber in a wood-yard.

'Is the child not with you?' she cried, as he drew near.

He lifted his head wearily.

'With me? No. I left her at home.'

Mère Rose turned pale under her ruddy southern skin.

'Left her here! Where is she then? She is not gone with the Mévert—that I know—we have have not seen her all the last half of the day, and we made certain that you had taken her.'

He said nothing, but pushed past her and sprang up the staircase.

He threw door after door open, the house ringing with his voice as he called her name aloud from cellar to attic;—there was no answer. Her books, her bonbons, her knot of autumn daisies, lay on the table in the little chamber; but of Viva there was no trace.

The woman, joined by two or three of her neighbours, stood listening below, frightened and bewildered. They had no love for this fantastic child,



'la demoiselle,' as they called her ironically, who held herself so haughtily with so much airy scorn above them and theirs; and who either sat aloft in her casement like a framed picture, or glittered out in the sun, with the negligent grace of some elfin thing far too good for the earthly shrine that enclosed her. But they loved Tricotrin with the faithful impassioned love that all the populace gave him; and for his trouble they sorrowed themselves.

They felt a certain fear of the look on his face as he descended the stairs and came to them.

'When saw you her last?' he asked them.

They had seen her at the doorway some hour in the afternoon, they told him; they could not be sure of the time; they were busy people, occupied with their washing, their ironing, their cooking, their flower-making, their sweetmeat-baking; they had had no time to take further note.

The grisette, sewing still by the fast fading light at her lattice, looked down; moved by that sympathy which makes strangers become in a second as friends of a lifetime.

'You ask for the child?' she said to him. 'I can tell you,—the little one sat there on the doorstep, as four o'clock sounded; a little page, a creature all red and gold, came up to her and took her away. They went together down the passage to that first corner yonder; and after a little while I

heard the noise of fast wheels and the trotting of horses. She is gone,—that I know,—for she never came back to the doorway.’

Then, without interest to see how her news was taken, she bent again over her work, to save the few precious moments of dying light; rocking the wooden cradle with her foot, and coughing painfully, a short hard feverish cough. A month before she had sung, as blithely as the linnet under his lime-bough, the mischievous students’ wine-songs that had served her as cradle-ballads.

Tricotrin heard :—and he drew a deep shuddering breath, as a soldier will do when the bullets have struck him.

‘ It is Coriolis,’ he said in his throat,—then without another word he swept the eager women aside, and passed down the street with the speed of the wind.

At the turn of the alley into the breadth of the street adjoining there came at a quick pace a string of young horses : they were from Normandy, and were wild and strong, and, being young, fleet of foot.

He knew the man who rode their leader ; a sturdy Norman breeder of cattle ;—they had been friends for many a year, smoking and sauntering and laughing together, under the spring-blooming apple orchards of the pleasant farm-country.

Tricotrin caught at the rope bridle of one of the foremost colts.

‘Will you lend him to me?’ he asked, breathlessly. ‘I am in sore need of haste: he shall be back by dawn.’

‘Take him!’ cried the Norman, startled, like the women, by the look which he saw on a face that he had never beheld before clouded with aught of care. ‘Take him; and keep him as long as you need;—I am at my old stables; you will bring him there.’

‘Surely:’—he stayed for no more words, but threw himself across the colt’s bare back, and urged it at a stretching gallop through the ‘crooked streets of the quarter.

The young horse, nothing loth to be free of the string, flew fast without urging.

Tricotrin turned its head straight southward, to where the actress rested in her gilded harbour, rich and soft with the plunder of many lofty galleons that had struck flag and foundered under the pirate’s prow.

He had spent no time in speech; he had wasted not a single moment in self-abandonment to the anguish that possessed him. But as he rode his heart was a hell within him: he was not alone a man who went to rescue from his spoilers a child that he cherished, he was a lover who went to save from dishonour the creature that he idolized.

And he knew that he might reach—too late.

The Norman colt, with its rough mane flying

and its bright eyes full of flame, asked no more welcome task than to be let loose to its fullest speed, as though it were once again at play in its own native pastures. Buildings and throngs, and all the vari-coloured evening life of the city, were passed by as fast as a summer breeze sweeps by over the corn; yet night was down ere he reached the outlying woods and gardens amidst which the toy-palace of Coriolis reared its gilded cupolas and shining roofs.

The colt was panting and tired out by the pace at which it had been ridden; it stood passively whilst he flung himself from its back, and tied the halter to the post of an entrance gate. The gates were unfastened; he passed through them, and up the grounds of the villa, strewn with the damp odorous leaves of the late autumn. Lights glistened through the interstices of the shutters all over the frontage of the dainty dwelling, bosomed in its shrubs and trees.

He cursed it as he looked.

Vice lived like this, while innocence died daily in the streets!

As the velvet curtain fell behind her, Viva found herself within the chamber.

The fear died away in her; curiosity, wonder, eagerness, a thrill of triumph and a throe of delight at her own rebellion all conquered it, and were

stronger than the instinctive and nameless dread within her a moment earlier.

Six or eight young men all rose and all turned their eyes on her, and all came to her with words of admiring greeting, which fell in a confused but delicious sense of homage on her ear. She shrank back with all a child's innocent shyness; she went forward with all a coquette's innate impulses.

She knew that she looked very lovely; she knew that this exquisite sorceress at her side was content to be eclipsed by herself; all the weakest and the worst things of her nature were appealed to and inflamed. The room whirled round her in a blaze of colour; the heavy perfume on its air seemed to float round her in clouds of odour; the dazzle of the jewels and the precious metals on the banqueting table looked to her like the riches of an India—she drew a deep breath, and laughed a little soft quivering, wondering laugh, that yet had half a sob in it.

This was the world at last then.

The world!—this paradise of brilliant hues, and priceless gems, and subtle perfumes, and honeyed words, and ardent adoring eyes. The world!—ah! how she marvelled that there could be found lives holy enough to sigh for heaven if this elysium were to be found on earth!

She had never a clear memory of all that followed on her entrance into that enchanted room. All distinct remembrance was lost in a chaos of

splendid images. For splendid this false glitter, this glory of meretricious colour, this joyless joy, this hackneyed revelry, looked to the youthful eyes which only saw its surface. For Viva, reared amidst the truth and the beauty of nature in innocent solitude, was too essentially a slave to the feminine soul within her to be poet enough to recoil from the falsehood of pleasure, poet enough to cling to the severity and simplicity of nature. The higher life escaped,—the lower allured her. It was the beaten out gold of the jeweller's laboratory, which was still far more beautiful in her sight than the sun-fed lilies and lilacs of the spring.

She had a confused knowledge of being led to the first seat at the table under the dome of light, that seemed to her like the noon-tide sun. Of seeing some handsome courtly faces bent towards her with that delight in their regard which she already knew so well as the tribute to her charms. Of hearing such flattery that her brain grew dizzy with it, and she felt stupified, like a bee overcloyed with honey. Of catching the vision of herself repeated on every side, in mirrors, till she saw that one best-loved image wherever her eyes turned. Of being moved to her gayest words and brightest laughter, till the audience applauded her idlest phrase as wit, and she felt herself a sovereign, whose words were precious as pearls and diamonds. Of tasting strange fruits, and wondrous confections, and wines that

shone like so much sunbeam, till she seemed to float on air and to lose all sense of earth, and to dream that she was amongst the gods of the Greek fable.

She was drinking in poison,—the poison of a hideous evil,—with her lips, and ears, and eyes, and thoughts; but she did not know it; she was happy, she was victorious, she was exultant, and she was too innocent to be conscious that sin was encircling her on every side.

They were heedful not to affright her, but only to allure; they wreathed the death's head in summer flowers for her; they drew her to the abyss with sweet careless joyous music; they killed her with a poisoned rose. And she did not know; she was still a child, and still only happy.

As she reigned there proudly and joyously, the actress Coriolis looked at her once with a throb of remorse in her dead conscience; but she hunted it away as it arose.

‘Pshaw!’ she murmured. ‘What matter? A little earlier?—a little later? Things like her are made to slaughter and to plunder. She would end like me—it is better to begin so. She will thank me one day that she has wasted none of the years of her youth!’

As she thus thought, a door at the farther end of the chamber opened; through it, facing her and behind the child, came softly the graceful, slender

shape of a handsome boy—a boy with dark eyes that gleamed with malice and triumph.

He stole gently across the room and up to Viva, and as gently his arm stole round her fair throat, and his lips brushed her curls.

‘Viva!’ he whispered, ‘I have thee at last—oh, my truant! And here are the deathless roses, the fairy pageants, the wines of the gods, that I promised thee!’

With a scream, as though a snake had touched her, she sprang to her feet.

The spell on her was broken; the netted dove soared from the snare.

‘Let me go!’ she cried aloud, as though by some instinct the full sense of her peril flashed on her. ‘Let me go! Oh, how vile I have been to come here! It is *you*!—you whom he forbade me ever to see, ever to speak to, ever to think of again; you who gave me your toys, and deemed me some peasant girl you could kiss at your fancy! It is *you*! How could I tell it? How could I dream it? Let me go—let me go! I have sinned once against him; I will not disobey him again—never again, never, never!’

The childlike words rang out loudly through the chamber; she stood with her face flushed, scarlet with rage, and shame, and outraged pride; her eyes flashing with scorn on her boy-lover; her mouth trembling with grief for her own disobedience.

In an instant, by the voice of her young Faust, the full knowledge of her own error had burst on her, piercing through the mists of vanity, and delight, and wonder, and intoxicated triumph.

She stretched her hands out in a piteous appeal to Coriolis.

‘Oh, take me back to him; take me back. You said you would; and I feel so frightened!’

Coriolis looked at her, and laughed.

The devil is never so brutal as when he comes into a woman’s form.

The cold, cruel, mocking laugh stung all the child’s proud spirit into life.

‘Oh, I see now!’ she cried out, in a mortal anguish that no man there heard unmoved. ‘I see now how true he was—how wicked you are! You laugh!—you laugh because you have made me disobey him. It is Satan who laughs just so when men disobey God. Oh how mad I was to hearken to you!—oh, take me back, take me back! Has not *one* of you all a heart to pity me? I never meant to grieve him! I only meant to grow great, and to pleasure him, and to be his glory. And I loved her so—that woman!’

Her voice died in a sob. It was a bitter suffering to her, the fall of her sovereign, the death of her ideal.

Her young lover smiled.

‘Love her still!’ he murmured. ‘What is her guilt?—to have brought you to *me*?’

He stooped as he spoke, and sought to draw her into his embrace—the door was burst open, the curtain dashed aside, a strong hand fell on him and forced him from her, and tossed him like a broken bough across the chamber.

With a shriek of joy she threw herself into the arms of her saviour.

The voice of Tricotrin rang like a trumpet-call through the silence.

‘What!—had men need to dream of a Devil when the world held Woman!’

Holding her to him with both arms he faced the baffled and silence-stricken revellers; and a great awe fell upon them, such as fell on the dissolute patrician mob of Rome before the passion of Virginius.

‘One cannot kill such things as you—the vilest things that breathe!’ he cried, as his eyes blazed upon Coriolis. ‘You murder—body and soul!—and yet we must let ye go free because ye are women, because ye can crouch and shelter behind the shield of the sex that ye outrage! God! if I set my heel on your throat I should do no more guilt than if I strangled the life from an adder. Yet I must leave you free because you are “woman”!—because you are the sole thing living on earth that can slaughter yet break no law; that can slay yet be left to smile on; that can make men curse the mothers that bore them, yet be safe in the safety of feebleness; the

only thing living on earth that has the strength of the giant for crime, and the weakness of the coward for shelter. Had Israel no courtesans in her camps, that, in the parables of her Scriptures, she made the chief leader of hell a *male* creature ?'

A dead stillness followed on the scathing fury of his words.

The banquetters drew aside, and gathered together, and left the woman alone.

Men feast with Coriolis, but none will fight for her.

They drain her wine-cups, for their own gold fills them ; but no sword leaps from its scabbard for her sake.

In pleasure she has many followers ; in need she is ever alone.

Then with hands that were, for that one time alone, ungentle to the child he loved, he tore from off her the jewels, the flowers, the laces of her festal robes, and flung them all crushed and torn down at the feet of her temptress.

'Great God !' he cried aloud in the bitterness of his soul. 'The tigress and the leopardess are tender beside Woman. Brutes though they be, they do not drive the young of their own kind down into the nets and the knives of the slaughter ! That work is spared for *her*—Man's helpmeet, God's best work !'



### CHAPTER III.



HAT followed she never remembered.

When she recovered consciousness the cool autumn wind was blowing on her, and the starless rainy night skies were above her; she was lying on the turf that edged the highway, under a knot of roadside trees; beside her in the gloom stood the dim shadowy form of a man and of a horse.

The former leaned over her and touched her lips with his hand as she strove to speak.

‘Say nothing; there is no need.’

The old familiar sweetness of the voice struck through her heart; she raised herself and gazed into his eyes; then trembled and hid her face in her hands, and sobbed bitterly: she felt unutterably ashamed, though the shame on her was vague and without name.

She sank back upon the turf, and turned, and rested her forehead upon the wet short grass, moaning a little like a wounded fawn.

He said no word, and his eyes were dry, as he stood over her in that attitude of abasement and humiliation. But he suffered a greater torture than had ever wrung his bright and happy life.

He had come, indeed, in time to save her from more than a child's broken ideal, a child's sorrowful disenchantment; but nevertheless was she to him as utterly killed as though he stood beside her dead body. His rage had spent itself upon her temptress; he had none for her.

It had an exceeding pathos for him, this frailness that had been seduced by such fictitious greatness, this innocence and folly welded into one, which had been allured by such a painted, worthless, wooden shape, mistaking it for the goddess of loveliness and pleasure.

He saw it with the pitying tenderness with which a gentle shepherd would see his youngest lamb allured by poisonous and gorgeous blossoms, sweet to the taste, and splendid to the eye, on to the edge of a volcanic pit. Anger against her he could not feel; she was too young, too blind, too well-beloved. But the thing that he had cherished seemed for ever dead to him; and a great blow smote him in the knowledge that the first hand stretched out to her with the world's golden bribes had been strong

enough to lead her away without a thought of him.

He had said that if she forsook him for that wanton he would leave her alone to her choice ; but when the test had come he had been governed by no impulse save that of saving her from peril and pollution. Yet the same feeling which had made him say that, were she faithless, he would never seek to coerce her to fidelity, moved him now, and made him hold her for ever as utterly lost to him as though her will had had its way, and she had gone to the career which to her ignorance and her credulity looked so fair.

He was struck the deadliest blow that life could have dealt him.

In the same sense that the sailor of the Riviera had been robbed and deserted by the flight of the wife he adored, so was he by the abandonment of the creature that had been made his own by every tie of human gratitude.

He had reached that sublime self-sacrifice which speaks in the words—‘ If I love thee what is that to thee ? ’ But he knew the bitterness which goes with those words, in the knowledge that the love which is given is counted as nought by the one on whom it is lavished ; that it is of so little account that the life which it cherishes passes heedlessly on, with no more thought of it than a laughing child on the first day of spring takes of the shy primrose

and the purple bells of thyme, which his foot crushes as he runs.

‘If I love thee what is that to thee?’—it is the supreme utterance of the passion which can withstand absence, and neglect, and oblivion, and opprobrium, and scorn, and thoughtless cruelty, and still live on, strengthened by every year, and purified by every stroke. But none the less is it the supreme martyrdom of love.

And it was in this wise that his good deed returned to him; and the bread that he had flung upon the waters came back, and was as ashes in his teeth. For of all things that are true upon this earth this is most true,—that the recompense of our holier acts comes not in this world, and is not given by the hands of humanity.

‘Rejoice, O ye faithful servants,’ is not uttered under the sun; for Life is merciless, and in its many agonies and in its many evils there is not even the wild justice that belongs to vengeance; there is but the sound of a mocking voice through all the desolation, laughing ever at the travail and the cheated hopes of men.

Suddenly she lifted herself, and caught hold of him, and gazed up in his eyes again; she did not ask for pardon with her lips, but her gaze prayed for it with the mute touching prayer of a dog’s.

He turned from her with an irresistible shudder; she was a child still; she did not know what she

had done ; she was conscious of her error, but not of its effect ; she knew she had done wrong, but she did not know that she was, in his sight, lost to him for ever.

The creature that had forsaken him must go from him ; the love that paid its fealty only to coercion, was worse to him than hate.

‘Hush !’ he said gently, as she strove to speak. ‘You are not well enough for words. There is no need of them—I know all.’

He knew all—without her shedding one ray of light upon the tale ; knew all the weakness, the folly, the innocence, the wilfulness, the vanity, that had lured her down a flower-sown path, on to the very brink of ruin ; knew all the insufficiency of the affection borne to himself, and given by himself, to hold her back from the sweet insidious seductions of riches and of flattery ; knew that he had been deserted and betrayed with none the less cruel, the less merciless infidelity, because that infidelity was the fault of a child’s selfishness, in lieu of a woman’s passion.

Then, still with the same gentleness that had more terror for her than his heaviest anger could have borne, he lifted her into a covered cart that he had summoned, as it rolled slowly towards Paris with a night freight of autumn flowers, and leading the Norman colt by its halter, walked slowly towards the city by the side of the little waggon, in

whose shelter Viva crouched, sobbing bitterly, with her rich silk robes covered by a leathern rug, and her face buried in her hands.

For the hour the bitterness of her chastisement equalled the cruelty and the weakness of her fault.

To the child—proudest among the proud—no punishment could have been so great as this intense humiliation, this passionate shame, that seemed to her scorching her very life up with its ignominy.

The way into Paris appeared one endless road of martyrdom; only two brief weeks before she had passed along this self-same highway, in the lustre of the illuminated night, dreaming that the city would receive her as some royal creature, some daughter of Carlovingian or Capetian races, born to wear their diadem, and sway their sceptre! And this was how she returned from her first flight towards greatness.

No discrowned queen ever went with heavier heart from her palace than she went now, back from the first-fruits of her own will, the first reward of her own ambition.

‘ Shall I *never* be other than I am ? ’ she thought in desperation; the dread was stronger on her, even in that hour, than any other fear, stronger still than gratitude, or repentance, or love for her redeemer, though these were all startled to vivid existence in her.

He, himself, walked in silence, wearily and slowly through the dark and chilly night, the tired steps of the colt keeping pace for pace with his own.

Passion had spent its first outburst of mad fury ; a dull hopeless anguish remained.

For she was dead to him as utterly as though he had slain her like Virginius, to save her from the arms of her spoilers.

The life that was faithless to him, could stay by his side no longer.

He spoke nothing as the waggon rolled tediously on its way ; nothing as it paused before the door of Mère Rose, and he lifted her out from its shelter and led her within the house.

As the women rushed to her with tearful cries of welcome and of joy, he motioned them away.

‘ She was lost. Let her be—she is tired.’

The mingled love and fear in which they held him subdued their curiosity ; they herded together in the passage hushed and afraid ; and she,—with her head hung down, and her face hidden from them, crept up the wooden stairs in the dull oil-light with slow sad steps, from which all the elastic buoyancy of her youth was banished.

Once within the little attic that served her as her bed-chamber, she thrust the rusted iron bolt within its socket, put out the oil flame with a quick gesture, as though she dreaded still that there

were some to look on her, and flinging herself down on her straw pallet, wept with heart-broken self-pity; half like a child from whom his favourite play-things have been taken, half like a woman from whose passions an ever-abiding shame has sprung.

‘ If I could only be great ! ’ she prayed ;—and fell asleep with that prayer on her lips.

Without—through the heavy rains that were falling through the dark and weary streets—he went slowly, leading the colt homeward.

He had received his recompense.



## CHAPTER IV.



At midnight, and till midnight was long past, he waited in the great courtyard of a great building.

The rains beat fiercely on him, but he did not heed them.

It was almost dawn when the lights of a carriage flashed red through the mists; he sprang forward between it and the gateway.

Its occupant alighted, and was stopped by him.

‘One word with you?’ he asked.

The Duke de Lirà started, turned, and paused.

‘Now!—yes, if you desire it.’

They went within, out of the wet black night, into a great, lighted, frescoed chamber, like the chambers of the palaces of Rome.

His hair, his garments, his beard were dripping with rain; he was splashed and jaded, and pale with

exhaustion and pain ; he observed no ceremony, and heeded no form ; he stood facing the man he had sought, and spoke without preface or address.

‘ You were in earnest to-day ? ’

‘ I was.’

‘ Then I come to take you at your word. You were right—I was wrong.’

The noblest words that can be uttered by human lips cost him a great pang in their utterance.

The other looked quickly at him, and said nothing.

‘ I was wrong,’ he pursued, rapidly. ‘ I mistook selfishness for justice, and was led astray by my own desires. I threw aside a great good for another, because I considered and studied myself. I was rough in anger with you, and ungrateful for the benefit that you offered. You stung my pride and my heart, and I was blind—blind to duty and justice. Stay ! hear me out—it was so. To-night I have had my punishment.’

He paused abruptly. He breathed loud and fast ; but his eyes never left their straight and keen regard into his companion’s, and his words were spoken unflinchingly.

‘ You said rightly. No duty can hold a female thing, no tenderness can content her, when once the passion of her vanity has been fired. Look you,—that child is innocent as any lamb in the

meadows, any dove in the woods, and yet the leaven of her womanhood is in her, and will urge her on to destruction. I thought, in my folly, that not to sin, not to suffer, not to know the meaning of evil, not to want any more than a bird wants in spring, just to live the free harmless life of a country-born creature, would suffice to make a child's joy, and a woman's content. I erred; many men have erred like me. There is a devil thrice as strong as we are—the devil of Discontent. There is the tempter that lures away from us our wives, and our mistresses, and our daughters,—there is the huckster that buys a soul with a string of seed-pearls, and chaffers away honour for a knot of sapphire-stones.'

His listener grew paler as he heard.

'What has chanced to the child?' he asked, hurriedly. She had touched his heart more deeply than he knew.

'This has chanced to her,—that the word of a strange woman had more sway with her than mine; that the eyes of men have found out that she has loveliness; that the snares of the city have been spread for her, and have caught her, and have maimed her. Two hours since I brought her out from the house of Coriolis.'

'Coriolis!—the actress!'

'Coriolis—the courtesan. Why be choicer in names than she is in her sins? She lured the child thither by specious words and gracious promises.

In the eyes of Viva she was an empress—an angel! Coriolis caught her fancy as the light takes a moth's. She led her where she chose, for she promised to give her greatness! She decoyed her there towards evening. I had left her alone. When I returned she was lost: she had been absent some hours. I knew at once where she was sure to have wandered. I forced my entrance into the villa—into the chamber where they sat at their banquet. They had throned the child there as a queen, and a terror of her reign had just commenced to touch her. I was in time to save her. What I said, what I did, I have forgotten.'

The broken, abrupt sentences escaped him harshly and in haste; the recital was terrible to him. Honour and honesty demanded it from him; but none the less was it bitter exceedingly.

'Stay! Hear me out,' he said, quickly, as his listener interrupted him. 'Let me end what I have to say. I rescued her from that accursed place, ere she had learned more than a vague fear and a wakening horror of the world into which she was flung. But what use is it to rescue the goat from the pit, if it return, again and again, to eat the poison-flowers that grow on its sides? And that is what Viva will do. She is innocent—yes; but how long can innocence grow side by side with vanity and ambition? The eyes of libertines have beheld her; the brutality that christens itself love has

fastened on her; the powers that lie in wealth are arrayed against her—she is not safe one moment longer. If her own heart were content, indeed, all these could with ease be defied. But against the foe in her own soul I can bring no army. I may restrain her from sin,—she is brave, and proud, and pure of thought—vice once unmasked to her would be loathsome. But I cannot keep her in peace; and—and—I dare not keep her in misery! Now, I have told you this. It was your due to know it. It may well be that you will withdraw the offer you made her two evenings ago. You will be justified in so doing. She does not know the evil she has wrought herself; but I know it, and I know that a woman-child that has been once beneath the roof of Coriolis may well be marked as dishonoured for ever.'

'Hush, hush! Would you deem me so brutal, so harsh?—for a young girl's unthinking rashness, a playful creature's foolish fault?'

'It would be no harshness; it would be justice. A woman's fair repute is like a blue harebell—a touch can wither it. What she did to-day—in rashness, in folly, as you say—may rise up in future years, and bring her bitter chastisement. Yet—it makes no difference with you, this thing that I have told?'

'None. I desire to serve her as greatly as I ever did.'

‘That is very nobly said. Then I accept your offer. I do not dare to thrust it aside.’

He stopped abruptly; his voice was hoarse, and died away in a whisper. The other made no answer; he divined the suffering that accompanied this adhesion to his will.

‘Let her come,’ he said, softly, at length. ‘For a brief space, at least. At its close—who can tell? Early impressions have great force, and what we are nurtured in we commonly prefer; her absence may show her how strong her love for you is, and how needful to her is the life of which her ignorance now wearies?’

‘There is no likelihood of that. She is a hawk that once cast down the wind will never come back to the wrist of her keeper.’

‘Why so? She loves you?’

‘Ay, as children love. Where is the child whom some costlier bauble than what you can give will not lure away from your hold soon or late? No—if she come to you once, she goes from me for ever. But—there is no need to speak of myself.’

‘There is great need. Look what an immeasurable debt she owes to you.’

‘I do not count it. Neither need she nor any one. I desire her to be happy, that is all. There is another matter which concerns her. The youth of whom I spoke to you, that young lordling, was one of the accursed crew to-night. Doubtless it

was his gold that bribed Coriolis to the setting of her snare. He has had his punishment ; he will not stir his bruised frame for months. When he does arise, shame will tie his tongue, and I can drive him from the country, for a season, by a power I have over him—the power of the knowledge of his own vices. But if you have ought to do with Viva, it is needful that you should be aware of him—he is the son of Estmere. He has broken faith with me ; he is traitor as well as tempter ; but I care not to wring his father's great heart with the tale of his shame ; cowardice and falsehood never before touched his race.'

'You spare the child's tempter ! You are generous indeed !'

'I spare Estmere—not him.'

'Lord Estmere ! What is he to you ?'

'He is a man who is honoured ; he is a man who has suffered. They are titles sufficient to forbearance. Beside, a girl's innocent name, a girl's stainless youth, they are things that will no more bear men's handling than will a snowflake as it falls ! Is there any other thing to be said ? Tell your mother what I have told to you ; Viva enters no home under the shelter of falsehood. But—do you know that the world will call you a madman ?'

'Wherefore ?'

'For believing the word, and receiving the Waif and Stray, of—a Bohemian !'

‘The world can do so. I have attended to it as little in my fashion as you in yours. I know that I have the truth from your lips; I have been, also, at the pains to verify the facts that you have related to me; and I believe that I see my way to rendering another life happy. As for my being deemed a madman,—it is ever the better things in us that the world calls our insanities.’

Tricotrin gave no reply; his eyes dwelt on those of the speaker with a long searching, penetrative regard, that seemed to seek to pierce the secret thoughts of his innermost mind. Then, with an abrupt movement, he turned away.

‘You have a noble nature, and you do a noble act,’ he said, briefly. ‘But—I cannot thank you till, in the years to come, I see how it is with her.’

Then, without farewell or obeisance, he quitted the chamber swiftly. He was even as the shepherd who had left the one ewe lamb that he had saved through storm and drought, and warmed in his bosom, and fed with his hand, at the threshold of the rich man’s palace.

The Duke de Lirà started as the door closed, and leant in perplexed meditation against the bronze reading-stand, on which the great volumes that he usually studied lay.

He was a man of pure intent, of gentle heart, of noble nature, untouched by pride, untainted by evil desire. He earnestly desired to benefit this beauti-

ful young thing, whose bright youth fascinated him. He was wholly unconscious that any selfish impulse prompted the determinate effort with which he had vanquished his mother's disinclination to take a foundling beneath her roof. He was incapable of cruelty, incapable of a base egotism; he believed himself only actuated by a genuine compassion; he had in no way awakened to any perception of the attraction that Viva's personal loveliness possessed for him; he had been entirely honest in all that he had said.

Yet, as he leaned there, a certain sense that he, with every sincere and good intent, had still done that which was cruel and unjustified, stole on him. He had considered only her welfare; he had been callous to the pain that her loss might cause to the only one who hitherto had set any value on her undefended and unclaimed life. He had thought only of gratifying the wistful desires that shone in her radiant eyes; he had forgotten that her translation to new spheres might leave a void, never to be filled again, in the heart that had grown to hold her as its treasure.

He had known Tricotrin to be a careless, fearless, high-couraged, laughter-loving wanderer, imprisoned by no ties, bound by no creeds, chained to no home. It had never seemed possible to him that such an one could love as tenderly, as he loathed bondage passionately, or that his affections could

strike deep root, though his temper flung off all fetters. It was only now, now when to perceive this was useless, that any glimpse of its truth flashed on him.

‘I hoped to do good,’ he thought, wearily. ‘What if it end in evil?’

Viva slept all the noon of the next day.

When she awoke, rest and slumber had healed all the harm that the night’s terror and fatigue had wrought on her: to the health and the strength of her youth illness was impossible. But the wound to her pride and her conscience had struck more deeply; it was with a dull heavy sense of pain and of shame that she arose, and dressed herself, and went to her accustomed seat in the attic-casement. For the first time fear—the sure shadow of all evil doing—possessed her: for the first time, she felt afraid of meeting the eyes of the friend whom she had wronged.

Moreover, there was the old leaven still working in her, despite all her loathing of her temptress, despite her instinctive consciousness of having escaped some terrible danger. The old desire and discontent still murmured in her soul as she gazed at her white linen dress, and thought of those pearls and sapphires she had worn, as she looked round the wooden walls of her attic; and thought of the soft scarlet hues and silver glisten of the actress’s banquetting-chamber.

‘ Ah ! why does wickedness have all the beauty and all the pleasure ? ’ she wondered with an aching heart : — perplexed by the question that mocks divines, and scoffs at philosophers, and baffles at every turn the efforts of moralists and teachers.

Virtue gives her children so often but stones when they ask her for the bread of life : wickedness casts the golden apples by thousands to her followers. And false is the preacher, who, denying this, bribes to the allegiance of the first by promise of her crowns, and seeks to affright from the palaces of the last by oaths that her festivals and banquets are Barmecide feasts held above an oubliette of death.

The poignant grief of the past night had somewhat softened with the waking day ; had somewhat changed into the flattered sense that her very error, her very deception, her very peril, were befitting the romance that belonged to such an enchanted princess as herself. Although the natural conscience and impulse of the child had made her recoil from her disobedience, and repel in an instinct of loathing the overtures of her young lover, now that she was safe and was alone, a certain sweetness lay for her in the remembrance of such an episode, a certain delight existed in the sense that she had been deemed worth the weaving of such a web to entrap her.

The dominant thing in her was pride, and her pride had been up in arms against her tempters :

but the next strongest thing in her was vanity, and vanity found a charm in the remembrance that she had passed through such a proof of her power.

At night she had wept with joy to be given back to the safe, familiar, innocent life of her childhood : but with the morning she grew well nigh ungrateful for safety, and thought in all the restlessness of nascent ambition : ‘ Shall I always stay thus like a wood-dove in a wicker-work cage, when the world holds so many palace gardens where such paradise-birds as I can spread their golden plumes in the sun ? ’

She had escaped from Coriolis : but she had not escaped from the poison that Coriolis had breathed over her.

It was well, she knew, to be safe in her haven ; but it was tedious, it was monotonous, it had no picturesque colour in it : and she began to sigh again, though ashamed of her sighs, for those glittering pleasures that she had just tasted, as a humming-bird just tastes the honey in a flower which a cruel wind shatters down into a heap of bruised petals.

The poison had touched her lips : though she had shuddered at its baneful sweetness, yet the thirst for more of its lusciousness had been left awakened and unappeased. She thought, with a sort of despair, of her future : it was the first

time that ever she had dreaded this unknown thing, which, ever ere now, had been enfolded in the gold-spangled mask-dress of so mysterious and royal a new comer; for the first time she now remembered that under its gay domino there might be seen, perchance, a skeleton,—a death's head. She had no accurate knowledge of what it was that she felt: but she had a vague nameless terror of herself, as though she were conscious that if innocence must be leashed with obscurity, the wild desire for greatness that lay in her would hurl her, sooner or later, into the dominion and the power of evil.

The full noon light was slanting through the lattice when the step which she knew and loved the best came up the wooden stair. She cowered down and buried her face in her hands: she felt heart-sick with humiliation, and all the love she bore him smote her with its remorse.

One thing alone had he ever forbidden to her; and that one thing she had seized in all the wilfulness of rebellion!

She never looked up as he crossed the chamber; she trembled as she felt that he drew near: she heard him pause beside her, and she shrank farther and farther back—in silence.

He stood near, silent also.

Then, by a swift impulse, she caught his hands and gazed up in his face.

'Forgive me! Oh do forgive me!' she cried,

while her voice was choked with tears. 'I was so wicked! and yet I meant no harm; she said you should know, and that you would learn to see you wronged her, and that I was a burden to you when I might grow great and be your glory! I never knew that young prince would be there—I never did indeed! Believe me—oh pray, believe me!'

'I believe you. If I had thought that you could lie, I would have left you to live and die in that hell you had chosen.'

The words were stern and chill, and perfectly calm: she shuddered under them, yet she took courage to look up in his beloved familiar face. And she saw that his eyes were fixed on her with a look that smote her to the heart: the look that tearless eyes will give to some treasured thing that lies cold in death. She gave a cry as of irrepressible pain, and flung herself at his feet, all the force and fervour of her variable nature roused in self-accusation and self-hate.

'Blame me—beat me—kill me! but do not look at me like that! I was wrong—oh I know it so well! I was vain, and foolish, and mad, and wicked, but throw me out on to the stones of the streets. Do not look at me again like that!'

A great pity changed and softened his gaze as he heard; he stooped and raised her gently.

'I was harsh—forgive me. I forgot how weak and young a thing you are. Hush!—do not sob so

bitterly. You were tempted, and you had not strength to resist. Well, it is oftentimes so with all. You are not alone, my little one.'

There was an intense compassion, a passionless sadness in the words, which awed her as no words of upbraiding could have done.

'But I am vile!' she murmured. 'So vile to have ever disbelieved you, and disobeyed you! Let me tell you all, and then—'

He stopped her.

'No. I know all I need to know. Spare me the tale of how much dearer than I, were the world and that wanton to you.'

He turned from her, unable to hide the anguish that this one disloyalty had wrought him: the child hung her head and said nothing. She blushed for the thoughts which a moment before had haunted her; she was disloyal to him still, the world still dethroned him.

He paced to and fro the chamber awhile, conquering the fierce longing which possessed him to seize for his own, let it cost what it would, this fair faithless life that already seemed so wholly his own. When he came again to her it was with that tranquillity in his look and in his voice, which he had striven, through so many hours, to attain ere he had come into her presence.

'We will never speak again of this,' he said gently. 'You disobeyed me, indeed, but you were

sorely tempted; you were wooed through your weakest follies; and you were moved by a noble thought even in the midst of your selfishness. I forgive it. I do not say forgive yourself; for you were very wrong, and I would fain have the remembrance of your error wound you sharply awhile, so that the cicatrice it leaves be a warning to you for ever. But we will never speak again of your action, or of your tempters. As you grow into womanhood you will see, as you cannot see now, the full extent of their wickedness and of your peril. I have other things to say to you. Listen.'

Viva, stilled and vaguely half affrighted, half consoled, raised her tear-laden eyes to his, and held her breath, and waited; with an indefinite prescience that the time was near at hand when he and she would be no more as they so long had been in this joyous and unshadowed life, which to her impatient ignorance had grown so wearisome.

'Listen,' he went on, speaking still with that calmness which he had taught himself to wear before her. 'Your act last night has taught me what I had feared before; that I have not the means nor the power to make you happy any longer. No! hear me out. It is not ingratitude in you; it is your woman's nature. You pine and pant for things that are not in my hands to bestow on you. A female soul that chafes, and longs, and harbours discontent, is ever on the balance towards evil: for sin

has already its surest forerunner and ally fastened upon the life that is at war with itself. Therefore, since I cannot provide the gratification of your desire, others must do so.'

He paused, and his breath came with a short sharp sigh: she listened, moved with keen repentance, yet also moved to a vague and eager expectancy.

'I should have told you yesterday,' he continued, with an effort, 'that your fairy was no fairy, as you may be sure; but what is quite as potent in this world, a rich and nobly born person. She is the mother of that gentleman whom you have seen here some few times; the Duchess de Lirà. She is very aged, but very powerful, very eminent, very wealthy: and she is filled with excellent intent to you. She invites you to pass a brief season with her, as her guest. Yesterday I refused; perhaps selfishly, but deeming that it was best for you not to enter and enjoy a mode of life that I cannot continue to you. Now, I know that some change must be made for you, and I have accepted this offer: because otherwise much evil will come unto you.'

'Oh no, oh no!' she murmured. 'I will be good, I will be content, I will try, indeed I will try, never to long for anything save what I have!'

'That will be vain,' he said bitterly. 'The dog that is only held by her chain will be faithless the first instant that she tears her neck from her collar!'

No, I do not mean to be cruel to you, my child. I mean only, that though you should honestly intend to be contented, and strive to be so, the content which requires to be striven after is a hollow thing, which embitters and deceives alike the one who seeks for it, and the one who lives near it. The moment that love or content need an effort to keep, both are valueless; both are dead bodies from which the spirit has flown. I have been your guardian, I will not be your gaoler.'

He stopped once more; the child said nothing: she could not have promised him honestly a content that should have been spontaneous and shadowless.

After a while he spoke again.

'The change that your temptress offered you, was to woo you from health and peace to the plague and the horror of a lazar ward; but the change that this great lady holds out to you may be, as in all likelihood it will be, splendid. At any rate it is a chance: a chance for you that I dare not put away untried, since the past night showed me how easily to be led into peril you are, and how hard to be weaned from evil. At your years Coriolis was no worse than you are now, a young thing, an innocent thing, a thing gay and careless, and full of play on a sunny seashore; but vain, and restless, and full of vague ambition and seething discontent, and impatience at her lot and at her home. Lest the time should ever come when looking on you I should curse you—as

every mouth that is pure with truth curses hers that is one lie incarnate—I know that you must go from me, I know that you must pass out of my life and out of my love, now, and it may be for ever.’

His voice sank very low, and grew unsteady over the last words; but, there was in his accent that which struck her with an intense fear, and moved her with a strange dim horror of the thing she might become:—as though in some glass of sorcery she beheld the fair face of her beaming youth, grey, and shrunken, and sightless, and ghastly with the corruption of death, with the ashes of age.

She seemed to behold as in some vision the power of evil that lay slumbering in her: the weakness that would grow to guilt, the dream that would fructify in sin, the ambition that reaching up to heaven would recoil and fall to hell; the nascent passions hushed under the calm of youth, like painted snakes asleep beneath the leaves of roses, that would arise and coil, and sting, and slaughter, and die at last of their own poison. She shuddered where she stood, and her lips grew pale, and she stretched her arms out to him with a blind piteous gesture.

‘She said that such things as I were always born for evil; it seemed her glory, and she bade me make it mine; ah! why did you not set your foot on me and crush me when you found me among the grasses? It had been better so.’

He quivered as though she had pierced him with a knife : the reproach that he had so long foreseen and feared rebuked him ; he had his reward at last.

But his thoughts chiefly, even in that moment, were for her. He took her hands, and looked down on her with pitiful gentleness.

‘ My child, I knew the time would come when you would utter that plaint against me. You are a woman, and born of a woman ! But you are, for all that, of a brave spirit ; and your reproach to me is the reproach of a coward. It rests with you to live your life nobly or vilely. We have not our choice to be rich or be poor, to be happy or unhappy, to be in health or in sickness ; but we have our choice to be worthy or worthless. No antagonist can kill our soul in us ; that can perish only from its own suicide. Ever remember that. Indeed, to creatures like you, the way to evil is perilously easy ; but none can force you down its incline unless your own vanities and passions first impel you. You have reproached me for the first time, with having saved you to run your course of life ; it is that you may not have to utter that reproach in far more deadly earnestness in years to come, that I shall send you from me now. Frail flowers such as you need fence, and shade, and culture, and training towards the sun. You cannot soar upward and grow straightly in storm, and cold, and drought. I was to blame that I forgot this. But I shall never again forget it. I was un-

wise enough to dream that I might graft on you some of my philosophy ;—I forgot that you were not of my sex ! The life that has been so good to me would not suffice to you. I should have known it earlier—'

'Yet my life has been so happy !' she cried, in involuntary self-reproach.

'Ah—so you will remember and realize, years hence, with vain regret, but it is no longer happy to you now. The desire for the unknown has come on you. Let us speak of it no more ; I have fair news for you. This great lady seems willing to befriend you ; go to her for a short season. It will be something fresh at least.'

'But what will Grand'mère think ?'

'She has not lived through eighty-three years to expect gratitude in the young, or memory in the absent. You were angered with me yesterday that I told you no more of your "fairy." I ought to have done so. It might have saved you from one harsh experience. But—I was selfish. I waited on my own wish, and I forgot your welfare.'

And to the breadth and the depth of the man's generous nature it seemed, indeed, that he had been guilty of an ungenerous and of an illiberal thing in counting, before the benefit of this foundling whom he had harboured, the wish and the peace of his own future. It seemed to him that to lay a claim to this existence which he had saved *because* it had been

thus saved by him, was a meanness and a cowardice that deserved its chastisement.

‘I rejected the offer for you,’ he pursued, with effort. ‘I did wrong; I see that now. I can only hope my error can be repaired. Last night I sought out the Duke de Lirà; I told him this; I told him also what you had done. Nay—do not shrink at that. You might shrink indeed if I let you go under his roof with a lie in your mouth. I told him—all. Of your passion for the stage; of your idolatry of this dazzling sinner; of the scene in which I found you; of the allurements that had tempted you. He knows everything. But your folly does not change his desire to befriend you. I have seen him again this morning. You can go—at once—to the existence he offers you.’

Viva drew a deep breath.

‘They are great people?’ she asked, wistfully.

‘They are of great rank,—do you mean that? There are great lives spent in garrets, in mines, in beds of agony, in galley slaves’ benches. But “great” in your sense means only—affluent and arrogant!’

A feverish bitterness in his tone, altogether foreign to him, arrested her attention.

‘You do not wish me to go?’ she asked, with the same wistfulness. ‘Tell me?—you know I will never disobey you again.’

‘Disobey! Am I your taskmaster?’ he said

fiercely, the fierceness that pain arouses in man as in every other animal. 'If you loved me would you talk of obedience? In love, two wills move together, inspired by one soul, as the two wings of a bird move, ever apart yet ever in union. But—that love is not between *us*. Your wings are your own; let them bear you where you will. What pleases you pleases me. Be free as air to follow your fancies. It may be for your good that this thing opens to you; it is not for me to close the door—'

'But what do you *wish*? It is that which I want to know!'

'What you wish is the question here. You wish for riches, rank, luxuries, prominence, all sorts of vanities and indulgences: well—you will see them nearer at least by this visit. That is something. It may be that they will lose their enchantment; and then—'

The sentence broke off abruptly; he could not put into words the hope which rose in him that, closely seen, these things which looked to him so idle and so artificial might lose their glittering bewitchment for her; and that in their hot-pressed atmosphere her young free heart might spring back at a rebound to the liberty, and the freshness, and the sincerity, of the life in which she had been reared.

'And then what?' asked Viva, anxiously.

'No matter! They may only gain surer sorcery over you; I forgot that you were feminine, my Waif!

At any rate, your new friend means well ; she can be of use to you, as poor old Grand'mère never can ; she shows great kindness in the mere interest she takes in you, because you are—what you are. You have grown impatient of the life you lead,—yes, and will grow more so, despite all your promises, which I know, for all that, were sincere. In the household of Madame de Lirà you can see a little for yourself what the greatness you covet is like. You can measure for yourself the differences between the existence you lead through me, and this existence in wealth and in pomp which you imagine can have no cares. The opportunity offers : it is but right you should take it. Come ;—there is nothing to wait for ; I will leave you there, and in eight days I will return for you.'

Viva stood irresolute ; something in his words, colder and more brief than they had ever been to her, though still so gentle, moved her with a certain fear, that dashed a chillness over the prospect before her.

'But if I am not happy there ?' she murmured, with a sudden terror.

In an instant she saw the smile she knew so well beam, in its brightness and its tenderness, over the face above her.

'Well !—you will know your refuge ! Come to me in your sorrows, if you forget me in your joys !'

For the first time some conception of the depth and magnitude of this priceless love which succoured her in all things, and claimed nothing at her hands in recompense, stole on her senses with a vague emotion of her own absolute unworthiness of its sublimity. She could not measure its height, more than the unaccustomed sight can gauge the height of mountains; but in some way it moved and awed her as the majesty of the everlasting hills will do those who gaze upward to them.

She looked at him one moment, then threw herself into his arms with all her childhood's abandonment.

'Ah! How selfish you must think me! If you had only let me die when you first found me, what burden and what trouble you had been spared!'

'Chut!' he said softly, though there was an infinite sadness in his eyes as they looked down on her. 'Where two love, one of them is always selfish. And—as for the other thing—not till you regret your life, my Waif, shall I ever regret it for you. If you stain it, or learn to feel it wearisome to bear, then indeed, but then only, shall I lament the hour in which I saved it.'

'But I have been only a care, a cost, a trouble to you? I have done nothing to repay you?'

'Pooh, little one!' he said lightly, for in that moment he felt too keenly to dare trust himself to earnest words. 'Floating a Waif is a more innocent

indulgence than most of our masculine extravagancies ; and as for payment,—when I hear you laugh that is quittance enough. And you have laughed often, I think, in your fifteen years of existence.'

'Ah, yes !' sighed Viva ; and for the moment that old life by the river-side, that she had grown so impatient to get rid of for the 'great world,' looked wonderfully fair to her—transfigured as the golden light of distance alone can transfigure either the landscapes or the years we leave behind us.

'That is right,' he said, briefly. 'Whatever the future brings you, it will be well to have had that laughter. And now, make yourself ready ; since this thing is to be done, do it quickly.'

He moved to the window as he spoke ; he was impatient of all bitter moments ; his philosophies and his instincts alike rebelled against pain as the great foe of animal life and of mental peace ; he was intolerant of depression, and resisted all calamity that strove to weigh him down, as he would have resisted a physical disease.

Opposite him, in the little casement under the gable, sat the grisette ; her work had fallen in her lap ; her tearful eyes were gazing vacantly out into the street.

Much the same pang ached in both their hearts ; the woman brooded fondly over hers, the man thrust his passionately away. To her there was a lingering sweetness in it that she clung to ; to him there was

an intolerable weakness in it that he strove with all his force to uproot.

They both knew that they who go to the Rome of their desires never return to those whom they have loved and left in the old deserted land.

Viva was quickly ready, and at his side ; she was in eager, tremulous excitement. She was glad that her desires had been granted thus ; and yet she was fearful, after her past night's deception, of what vipers might lie curled in the purple passion-flowers of the world's pride and pleasure.

Tricotrin said little on their way, a way that led through country fields and the fragrance of the Ville d'Avrée woods, out towards where a summer villa stood, sheltered under reddening foliage that joined the forests of Versailles.

He lifted her from the covered waggon in which they had driven, and walked with her some little distance down a broad tree-shadowed lane. It was now almost dark. At the end of the road were the gates of her destination. In this sunny autumn weather the Duchess de Lirà preferred this light and pleasant place to either her great palaces in the Faubourg, or her château under the shadow of the eastern Pyrenees. Outside the gates he paused a moment ; there was no one in sight save an old man sitting under one of the sycamores resting with a load of wood. He laid his hand on Viva's shoulder, and looked down into her eyes.

‘My child, you have your heart’s desire ; you go among “great people.” It may make your happiness ; it may make your misery. Granted wishes are sometimes self-sown curses. Whichever it be, remember—go where you will, do what you may, you can always come back to me !’

The infinite tenderness of the words raised something akin to terror in her ; her colour went and came in rapid changes.

‘But it is only for a little time !’ she said, rapidly. ‘It is no separation ? I shall be with you again so soon ?—’

He smiled : the smile that smote her heart with remorse, though why she could not tell.

‘A week is an age sometimes at your years. I hardly think you will remain or return to me—the same. But that we must chance, Grand’mère and I. Anyhow, love that has not been put to the test is no love ; and the young bird that has never been allowed to fly, likes its cage from habit, not choice. Go within. I have rung ; they will come to you. In eight days you shall see me again.’

Before she could reply or resist he had closed the gate gently on her, leaving her standing within the enchanted ground of her new paradise, and had gone back, alone, through the chequered twilight shadow of the road. The echo of his steps upon the gravel growing fainter and fainter as he

passed away, filled her with a sudden sense of loneliness and of ingratitude.

‘Oh, come back, come back!’ she cried. ‘I do not want any one but you;—I do not wish to stay.’

But the words did not pierce the metal gates that were now closed between them; and a servant, waiting for her, approached her with so courteous a deference, that she forced back her tears, and began to dream again that this was the commencement of that living fairy-tale in which she, from the obscure chrysalis of a Waif and Stray, would change into the winged and glorious butterfly of an omnipotent Princess.

Through a wilderness of floral beauty, through gorgeous autumn flowers, blooming and blazing around snowy statues and sparkling fountain-spray, through aisles of scented bushes and of orange trees powdered with their yellowing balls, she was led into the house. For the third time she was in an abode made luxurious and elegant by wealth; for the third time the glow and shadow and subdued brilliancy of gold and silver, paintings and statuary, velvets and marbles, were about her as she moved; for the third time the fragrance, the grace, the stillness, the indescribable beauties of good taste, and of choice art, filled the chambers through which she went. And they had lost none of the unutterable delight which at the chateau of Villiers, and the house of Coriolis, they had possessed for her. She

drew a deep breath as she saw and felt their sorcery ; she already forgot the echo of the steps at whose retreating sound her tears had started but a few moments earlier.

She saw no one in any of the rooms and galleries she traversed. Her conductress, a Creole woman, took her in silence through them, and only spoke when, at length, she threw one door open.

‘ Mademoiselle will wish to rest ; this is Mademoiselle’s chamber,’ she said, with one hand lifting up the silk curtains before the entrance.

Viva gave a cry of delight—the same childlike, eager, rapturous cry as when in the wine country she had found a purple butterfly, or heard a new legend from Grand’mère.

The small octagon chamber glistened with azure and white ; a silver-winged angel hovered over the little sequestered bed ; flowers in profusion filled each nook and corner ; a little fragrant fountain played in a jasper basin between the mirrors was a single picture, a Proserpine wandering amongst lilies and asphodels ; beyond, through the open window, lay the gardens, and avenues, and orange-ries.

Viva stood in a trance of enchantment, flushed, mute, beatified.

The curtain fell behind her ; she was left alone. Her first impulse was to turn to the mirror ; her next to gaze around the chamber that was ‘ hers.’

The little wooden chamber, under the ivy-covered eaves in her old home, had been kept for her at the cost of many a personal sacrifice, and the trifles that adorned it of quaint carving, or of oil sketches, had been the gifts of most tender pity, of most generous love. This room, so fair to her sight, was but one amongst many similar in the house of a great personage, and all its beauties had been prepared, not for her, but for any other visitant who might be guest there.

Yet how mean and poor looked that little room of Grand'mère's ! How exquisite and luxurious a nest was this !

'The fairies have remembered me at last !' she cried aloud, with her hands clasped above her head in breathless ecstasy.

And she—had forgotten one who never had forgotten her through all the years wherein the fairies had been silent to her call.



## CHAPTER V.

**W**HEN he went thither again at the end of the eight days, the servants brought him a little note. It was very short, and like a child's.

‘MY BEST FRIEND,—I am so happy; I never dreamed that any life could be one half so beautiful. They take me to-day to see a great review of soldiers. I fear that I shall miss you. If I do, will you leave word whether I may stay here three months? The Duchess has asked me, and I hope very much you will say—yes. Your own,

VIVA.

‘My love to Grand’mère and Mistigri. The Duke is so good to me; and has bought me such magnificent things.’

He read it, crushed it in his hand, and asked them for a pencil. Then on its little torn envelope he wrote the one word of assent required.

‘Give that to—Mademoiselle,’ he said simply, as he left it in the servant’s hand, and went out from the gates.

Mistigri trembled as she looked up in his face that was white as with the whiteness of death.

The months went by, and Tricotrin might have been numbered amongst the dead for any sign that came to her from him. Where he went no one knew. The fishers of the western coast could have told, and they only.

The weather was wild and fierce ; storms dashed the shores and beat the boats to pieces ; the nights were filled with hurricanes, and the beach was strewn with drift-wood and the flotsom and jetsom of barques broken on the rocks. All through that bitter time of the early winter he was with them. It was no new thing ; and they were well used to see him in the driving gales,—with the winds tossing his hair, and the rains beating on his bare chest and shoulders, and the breakers leaping on him as on a granite block,—bring in some fishing-boat, whose load would be the sole support of some drowned sailor’s widow, or launch some life-raft through the surge to reach the stricken vessel that, reeling and dismayed, ploughed the blackened sea.

Few winters passed but brought him, in the

time of peril, to the Biscay-beaten coasts. He loved sea and storm like some Norse viking of the old wild years; the rising of the sullen winds was to him as the trumpet-note to the war-horse; the exultant courage in him delighted in the contest with the waves; and he loved the brave, rough, patient, melancholy, great-souled people who lived beside the everlasting waters, and gained something of the grandeur and the poetry of those waters in the midst of so much rugged poverty, so hard a conflict for the bread of life. For many years he had appeared amongst them at such seasons; and in the superstition engendered by the mingled tragedy and simplicity of their existence, they looked upon him as on one of more than mortal strength and power, at whose bidding the seas released their prey, and delivered up their dead.

That he made music at their feasts, that he flung their nets over his shoulder, that he stacked seaweed for their aged and infirm, that he mended their sails singing as he sat on the sands some of their old-world romances, that he laughed with their handsome fisher maidens pushing a boat through the surf,—all these things had not made them the less deem him half a god, though his vigorous limbs were clothed in their garb, and he had been more than once dashed, bruised and senseless, on their rocks in vain effort to succour some sinking vessel.

These months in the late autumn he had passed

amongst them, in the salt, hard, fresh seafaring-life. If pain were on him he never let it brood undisturbed; if regret or desire haunted him he exorcised them by some means or other; his whole temperament rebelled against the weight of care or sorrow, and sought light as instinctively as do the sunflowers.

Yet, against all his efforts, and all the happy philosophies that had kept youth so bright and ardent in him through years that bring the burdens of age to many men, against his will and his endeavour, he could not turn his thoughts from Viva. He could not tear out from him the jealous, carking care that filled him when he thought of her in strangers' hands, the hot, senseless hope, which lived in him against all reason, that she would cling to him still in preference to the things of pomp and power. He grew to hate his love for her—but never to hate her. He knew that it had lost the purity and the peace which had sanctified it for so long; he knew that it was the love of a man for the fair eyes, and the smiling mouth, and the white limbs of the woman's beauty that tempts him. That love he had known oftentimes; but it had ever been a gay, wind-tossed, chance-sown flower in his path; not a long-cherished blossom like this, with thorns hid in the heart of its sweet white leaves to wound the breast upon which it was clasped in caresses.

He hated the passion that had sprung up in him from out of the kindly and pitying care he had given

her: it seemed to him to poison all the tenderness he had felt for her in the time when his hand had played with her hair, or his lips had touched her cheek in the unthinking and negligent fondness that he might have felt for a favourite dog. It was on the impulse of that hate for his own instinct of jealous possession that he had embraced the offer of a new life for her, dreading lest his love made him blind to what was best for her, dreading lest it warped him to injustice and to egotism.

He, careless and heedless in so much, watched with keenest scruple his own nature, lest, under the angelic guise of tenderness for her, there should be the hellish snake of envious desire. He had served her; all she had, and all she was, she owed to him; at his will he could have cast her out to the starvation of an unowned beggar-girl: for this cause he held himself debarred by all common law of honour from any shape of tyrannous usurpation over that which lay thus wholly at his mercy. The titles that other men might have thought gave him the rights to do with her as he would, were in his sight the strongest forbiddance from all such rights' despotic exercise.

Once he had saved a bird whose wing was broken; it had been in his earliest boyhood, and he had grown to love fervently the creature he had succoured, whose shattered pinion he had bound, and whose food and water and sod of grass had

been his daily care for months through a keen snow-laden winter. With the spring, just as its song grew music on his ear, and the brightness of its pretty eyes rewarded him, the little lark fluttered its feathers in impatient longing, and beat its beak against the cage that had so long been its sanctuary from the winds and the hail that had struck so many birds down, frozen, on the ice-bound earth.

He, a mere child, had wept grievously as he saw that feverish fretting of the lark which wished to leave him; some others standing by laughed to see his tears: 'Silly lad!' they cried, 'can the bird escape you? Bend its cage-wires closer; so shall you always have it with you.'

But the boy had shaken his head.

'I have done it good, shall I do it evil? It must be free to stay or to go, else what is its love worth?'

And he had opened the door of the cage, and turned it towards the west where the sun was setting: then he waited and watched.

The lark saw the glow of the sun, and moved, and lighted awhile on the edge of its prison-house; then with one glorious burst of song soared upward, higher and higher, towards the golden radiance of the skies.

He looked after it as it flew, with the great tears blinding his eyes; but he smiled as he heard the hymn of its joy.

‘It is happy,’ he said gently, as he hung the cage on the bough of an oak. ‘And—when the winter comes back perhaps it will be glad to come too.’

But the bird never returned, though the empty cage stood open all the seasons through.

The same impulse as had moved him then, moved him now. As he had given his lark its liberty, so he gave her freedom to his foundling. What was fidelity worth only born of coercion? The song of the lark had been sweet to him; but its melody would have been jarred for ever had it come from the throat of a captive. The love of the child had been sweet to him; but its caress would have been embittered to him for ever had it come from lips on whose breath there had hovered a sigh.

Let her go!—the child like the lark.

If the summer of other lands seemed fairer to her sight she must be free to take flight to them; if the old fostering care seemed dearer than the glow of foreign suns, then only would the love be willingly given, and not prison-born. Any way, the door was opened; and though the ingrate should wing swift way to vapour-palaces of sunlit cloud, still would the deserted refuge wait, unclosed; in case that storm, and snow, and driving blasts, should ever bring the wanderer home, with drooping wing and breaking heart.



## CHAPTER VI.

**T**HE thirtieth day of the last month came. He passed once more up the linden-lined road. The bounteousness of colour that had so late made the earth beautiful with fruit and flower had shrivelled, dropped, and perished. Wild winds were tossing the russet leaves, and the great woods were bare and brown. There was winter in the air; and all the spikes of grass were white with frost. In so brief a space all the brilliancy and wealth of autumn had died away as though it had never been. Was the brief time long enough, likewise, to kill the young warmth of a girl's heart as it had killed the colour of the earth?

He traversed the grounds unobserved; it was a wild and gloomy day, and no one was at work in the gardens. The house itself was long and low, with broad windows that nearly touched the ground, and

had a terrace running beneath them. The rooms within, at all times visible, were doubly clearly seen from the bright light of wood fires inside them that glowed through their lozenge-shaped panes.

Instinctively before one he paused.

In the full illumination of ruddy colour that was reflected back from the mirror-lined walls of the room, and glowed upon the rose hue of its velvet hangings, he saw her.

She stood upon the hearth, in the full warmth of the fire-flames, and was laughing, with her head thrown back, as she tossed to and fro in the air a pretty silvered toy, a Protean Arlecchino jewelled and enamelled, that went through changeful antics as he was tossed or poised. Her face was radiant with laughter at the puppet's evolutions; dainty robes clothed her tall slender limbs, and trailed behind her on the floor; gold buckles glittered on her pretty feet; and her hair, turned backward in the Louis Quatorze fashion, was fastened by an arrow of gold half hidden in its rippling clusters; wealth and rank had set their seals on her; she looked no more a child but a beautiful woman.

What need had he to enter? His question was answered by his first glance at her face.

Had the lark come back from its flight through the sunlit ether? Would the girl come back from her ascent into the luxury of riches?

His heart stood still, his hope died out, as he

beheld her. With all that radiance on her face where was the shade of one regret? With all that mirth upon her lips, where was the sigh of one remembrance? He had lost her for ever. And he knew his loss as well as though he had seen her laid down in her grave.

Slowly, and with one long backward look, he turned and moved away towards the dark cold shelter of the woods; and she, unconscious all the while—laughed on, tossing her Arlecchino upward in the fire-glow till his jewels sparkled and his silvered bells rang again.

It was two hours later when Tricotrin returned, and the dark day was waning.

He desired then to see the Duke de Lirà. He was admitted at once, and conducted to where the nobleman spent most of his hours when in his mother's villa; a small lofty book-lined room, dusky even at midday, yet rich in bronze and statuary, and antique things that gleamed curiously from out the twilight.

Tricotrin went quickly forward, and spoke ere his host could speak.

'I have kept my word: keep you yours. Let me see Viva. No! do not speak. Have patience with me. I desire to see her first and hear you later. I address the request to you since she is beneath your roof, but my right to her is not wholly gone; by it I come to claim her.'

The Duke de Lirà looked at him in silence ; his face was pale, his blouse was wet with night dews, his eyes were full of speechless woe, like the dumb woe of a dog. There was that in him which made his hearer obey the abrupt and fiery discourtesy of the command.

‘I will send her to you here,’ he said as briefly, as he rose and passed out through the door of his chamber, and closed it behind him.

Some moments drifted by, whether many or few he who waited could not have told ; then the door reöpened, and, with a light swift bound, the gay grace of her form came towards him, all lustre and light in the gloom, with the shining Arlecchino still in her hand. It was with a cry of welcome and delight that she sprang to him ; and it thrilled through him as the song of the lark had thrilled through his heart as a child.

He caught her with unconscious passion in his arms, and kissed her with kisses that burned her cheek like fire ; then as suddenly he loosened her from his embrace and put her from him. He remembered that he had no right to force on her caresses, for which in a brief while she might blush with shame, no right to steal their virginity from lips that another might soon seek with a lover’s or a husband’s title.

She, all innocent of his thoughts, laughed up in his eyes : her hair had been ruffled by his touch,

and her delicate dress stained by the night dews on his own; and the toy she held bruised and bent by the violence of his embrace.

‘Oh the poor Arlecchino!’ she cried, ‘how you have hurt him! And he cost a thousand francs in the Palais Royal yesterday.’

With an irrepressible impulse he dashed the puppet from her hold on to the ground.

‘That is how you greet me!’

She, who had never heard that bitter burning passion in his voice before, stood silent, trembling, afraid, amazed, gazing at him with her bright large eyes. She did not know what she had done.

‘I did not mean anything,’ she murmured, ‘it is only—the Arlecchino amused me so, and he is broken.’

The words recalled him to himself, and roused him from the delirium of wounded love that had found its violence an issue in the toy’s destruction. He stooped for the puppet, and raised it; his rival of tinsel and clockwork that was before him in the thoughts of the creature who owed him her salvation! His voice trembled, but was very gentle as he answered her.

‘Forgive me, Viva: I erred greatly. I had no right to bruise your plaything, above all as I have not a thousand francs to give for any toy! But I have skill at these things, and I will mend his injuries; and—for my violence give me your pardon.’

The words found their instant way to the still fond heart of the child.

‘Oh, what do I care for the toy?’ she cried. ‘The Duke will buy me another. I was only afraid I had angered you; and—I am so glad to see you once more!’

He answered her nothing, but stooped his head over the Arlecchino. The welcome was little worth, it was the welcome of a playful unconcerned affection; and, already she looked to a rich man for the solace of her woes, the provision of her pleasures!

Viva looked at him earnestly, in some perplexity; she was afraid that she had pained him, but also she was irritated that he should have acted so strangely. Three months had been sufficient space for her to have learned to look upon herself as a thing of beauty and of witchery to whom all should bow and give way.

There was a long silence, between them; a silence that she spent, almost instinctively, in noting the stains of the grasses and the rains upon his linen, and thinking how much nobler he would look if he wore velvet, like the men whom she had seen of late. The feminine mind played with frivolities and caprices while the masculine soul suffered a mute martyrdom.

At last he looked up, laying the puppet down.

‘The toy will be none the worse; I will remedy what is amiss. And now, have you forgotten, Viva,

that this day is the last of those which you were asked to pass here ?’

She started ; and a flash of remembrance and of terror came over all her face.

‘ I had forgotten it,’ she murmured.

‘ And—you regret it ?’

She looked down ; and he saw her mouth quiver. She said nothing.

‘ You have been happy here then ?’ he asked.

‘ Oh !—happy ?—yes !’ she murmured, the flood-gates of her enthusiastic speech opened at last. ‘ Happy ? Why ! it is like enchantment ! You do not know how beautiful the life is ! They have been so good to me. They have given me a little horse, snow-white, and a hundred pretty things like Arlecchino, and many dresses, all as beautiful as this, and some more so ; and then every nook and corner of the house is like a picture ; and one has never even to pour out a glass of water for oneself ; and my own room is so exquisite, and the Duke is always giving me some new surprise or pleasure : you do not know what it is ! And then one feels so great too—like a princess—amongst it all !’

‘ And who loves you—whom do you love in it ?’

The question was passionate in its scornful demand, its vehement reminder of the one thing lacking.

‘ Love ?’ she echoed. ‘ Oh, no one ! But then

—it is all so magnificent; it does not matter about that.'

'You have learnt the world's lesson swiftly!' he muttered, as he swung from her.

The heartless creed couched in the guileless words struck him with an intolerable suffering. What avail to have given her care and tenderness for all these years?—a month of luxury outweighed them all!

'I am very different to what I was!' Viva retorted, with a certain petulance and offended pride, as instinctively she glanced at herself in one of the mirrors. Although it was twilight she could see the gleam of her gold arrow in her hair, and the trailing grace of her azure skirts.

'You could not speak a sadder truth!'

The words were hoarse in his throat with the acuteness of disappointed mortification. Unconsciously he had hoped, far more than he knew, that the ties of old association and of gratitude might have been strong enough to withstand the temptations that sought to break them asunder. Unknown to himself the idea that the gilded restrictions of a lofty station would gall her, much as they would have galled him, had misled him; and, relying on the freeborn temper of the child, he had forgotten the ambitious vanities that ran with it.

'A sad truth!' echoed Viva, with all her graceful petulance in arms against the attack upon her

vanity, while her eyes sought the beloved reflection of herself in the mirror. 'A very happy one, surely! You might as well say that it is sad that the exquisite little old Duchess here, who is just like one of her own porcelain figures, does not resemble Grand'mère, clicking over the snow in her wooden shoes, or peeling onions to put in the soup-pot!'

'For shame, Viva!' he cried, vehemently. 'Have you less gratitude than the stray lambs feel for the hands that fed them when they were motherless? Your Duchess! I know little of her; but I know that if all her life through she have had the truth, and courage, and charity, and chastity of the brave old woman you despise, it will be well for her when her last hour comes. What think you the noble old soul, who wearies for a sight of your face as she sits by her lonely hearth, would feel if she had heard your words now?'

The rebuke was passionately uttered; it touched her to remembrance, contrition, and all the affection still strong in her beneath the selfishness that stifled it. She sprang to him with all the charming impulsive grace of her childhood.

'She would call me wicked and worthless, as I am. My tongue should have been cut out before it should have breathed a word against her. Dear old Grand'mère! I care for her so much, I do indeed. It is only everything here is so different; it

makes me forget, I think ; it turns my head dizzy like wine ! ’

‘The wine of flattered vanity—yes ! Heads wiser and older than yours grow drunk on it,’ he said, with a quick, impatient sigh as he turned slightly from her.

‘You think me cruel and foolish then,’ she murmured, with a touch of piteousness ; her reverence and love for him were stronger than anything else as yet in her, and were making her odious in her own sight if she were unworthy in his.

He looked down on her with a smile, whose sadness and whose tenderness she could not measure, for they were beyond her knowledge.

‘A little cruel—youth always is in its own intense self-absorption ; and—as for foolishness, we cannot look for you to be very wise : but you follow the world’s wisdom in choosing the things of the world. But—how will it be with you, Viva, if you be obliged to come back to the only life I can give you ? ’

He saw her turn pale, and she gave a swift, upward glance of alarm.

‘I will try and be content,’ she said, softly ; and her promise was sincere.

But scarcely any answer could have stung him more. He knew what content that has to be striven for is worth ; he felt all the bitterness of such niggard return for the lavishness of his own

donations. He repressed the words that rose to his lips. She had been so utterly and entirely his debtor that he would not bring against her the charge of her ingratitude, lest it should seem like a citation of his own benefits.

‘You mean,’ he said, calmly, at length, though the calmness was very hard to attain, ‘that you could not be simply and sincerely happy in your own life, having once tasted the luxury and brilliancies of this? You mean, that if you have to return to Grand’mère and her cottage you will rebel with ceaseless regret against them both?’

Viva hung her head, and her eyes went instinctively to the gleam of her golden arrow in the mirror.

‘No, no,’ she said, with the tears trembling in her voice. ‘It is not that—I love you so dearly, and Grand’mère too!—but it is only—’

‘Only what?’

‘That I think I am born for this life! I always seemed, somehow, to *want* it so much, even when I did not know what it was like! The Duchess herself, who is so terribly proud, says that she is sure I come from some great race or another. And it may be, you see,—why should it not be, when all this that is great seems to come to me by nature? You remember, that English lord with the beautiful face said just the same thing when he passed me?’

Tricotrin made no answer.



He stood in the shadow, where she could not tell what changes swept over his features. It cost him a long effort ere he could reply to her as he desired to do—without trace of the conflict that raged in him. It was a strange caprice of accident by which, in the very words with which she endeavoured to exculpate herself, she thrust deeper into his soul the iron wherewith she so all unconsciously stabbed him.

‘You may be right,’ he said, at length. ‘Though beware how you lean on the thought of some lofty origin; it will be but a broken reed at best. I see, however, plainly one thing,—that whether you come of prince or peasant, you will never again be happy in obscurity. You would sooner go away to Coriolis than back to Grand’mère!’

Viva coloured hotly.

‘Only to Coriolis’ fame: it has greatness in a way at least.’

‘Greatness! Good God! how irresistibly what is vile looks fair in the eyes of woman! Pshaw! What avail to rear you fickle exquisite things in innocency and solitude; you find your way to sin and its pomps as instinctively as mice steal out to honey!’

The violence of the words escaped him ere he knew it, in the insupportable anguish that it was to him to find her thus wedded to vain things, and turned from all that he had thought would grow but dearer to her by their absence.

She—ignorant of his meaning, but comprehending only that he deemed her inconstant and unworthy—stood with the tears in her eyes, half of sorrow, half of offence. She knew that she had been heartless and wrong, but also she felt herself aggrieved.

She could not tell that the feeling which moved him was the consciousness that she, unless lifted from temptation and encircled by the safe-guards of a sure and lofty position, was precisely of the nature that would be swiftest drawn down to gilded evil, that would be easiest lured to drink of the perfumed wines which poison as they intoxicate. The very ignorance and purity of her mind would lay her open and unguarded to the seductions which would come to her with every appeal to her vanity and her tastes, and with all the darker traits veiled from her and unguessed. He saw that, had the desire of his heart been given him, and the creature of his love been his, there could have waited for him in the future no other fate than the fate of Bruno.

She did not know this.

The lovely, careless, graceful thing, thinking of her golden arrow in her hair, and the azure glisten of her dress, never even dreamed of the sharp despairing torture of the man. And he took heed, even in his torture, that she should not. Why vex the thoughtless heart of a child by letting her behold a wound which she could neither measure nor comprehend?

Not to pain her was his first thought ; and he crushed the thorns into his own breast unseen, rather than let them touch the hand which she might have stretched out in pity, had she known that they were wounding him.

There was a long silence between them ; when he spoke it was gently and gravely.

‘I seem harsh to you, my child. I am not so, God knows. You have the foibles of your sex in a strong degree ; but we should scarce expect you to be free from them,—with such a face as yours, and barely sixteen summers over your bright head ! You are enamoured of your life here, doubtless, though to my thinking the life you have led was far simpler, and freer, and happier. But there is one thing you seem to have forgot, Viva ; your sojourn here was but for a visit. Though you have been given so many gifts, you are but a stranger ?’

She was silent. He saw once more the quiver of disappointment on her mouth. She had never thought of this—to her belief it had been the fairies who had brought her to her rightful heritage.

‘You have forgotten that ?’ he pursued. ‘You have forgotten then, also, that to-day you were to go back with me to your own old home ; since no guest can outstay the limits of her invitation ?’

Viva lifted her head, with an impetuous passion in the gesture.

‘Oh, wait, wait !—hear me ! It is not because

I am ungrateful, not because I do not love you and Grand'mère with all my soul ; but, indeed, I must be something great somehow. If it be only charity here, I will not stay. I know I was born an aristocrat like themselves. I will not remain for their alms, however splendid they be. But do let me go on the stage. I need not be wicked, as that cruel Coriolis is. I will obey all you wish ; I will do all you say ; but there I could conquer the world,—or what is the use of the beauty you all tell me I have ? It is not because I am heartless, not because I do not feel all that you and Grand'mère have done for me ; but I *know* that if I go back to be shut up, all the long winter through, in our little room by the river, I shall die just with longing for some other world, like the Mexican bird that the sailor son of Sarazin brought his mother from over the seas !'

The whole pent-up passion of the girl's heart broke out in the vehement words. Under the terror that she would have to return to the monotony and peasant companionship of her home, the flood-gates of her impetuous desire were unloosed ; and there poured out before him the turbulent stream of her long-repressed thoughts.

Of what the stage was in reality she had even yet little notion ; it was only in her sight a means whereby women of beauty and genius soared their way, from obscurity and poverty, into the light of

the world's adulation. Every sentence she uttered pierced him to the heart with the sharpness of steel ; but she knew nought of that. She knew only that he loved her. Why, then, should he deny her this one yearning of her nature—to be great ?

He let her speak on, answering her nothing. To answer her must have been to either condemn or affright her ; and he dreaded lest she should see the tempest that raged in his heart of grief, and despair, and desire.

This was all that he had reared her for—to hear her speak of the river-nest that had sheltered her as of some prison-house, and beseech his permission to follow the steps of the vilest women of Paris !

But of what he suffered there was no trace in his voice when, at length, he replied to her,

‘I have told you—I would rather see you in your grave than on the stage. But that may be a prejudice. You are right, an actress may be as noble and pure a woman as the very best of her sex, but,—if she be, she is hissed off the boards ! I see well that your heart is set on some far different life than any I can give you. I will think awhile on all you have said, and see you again. Meantime, go ; and if you can, bid your host come to me.’

She paused before him, wistfully.

‘You are angered against me ?’

He stooped to her, and there was an emotion in

his voice that she had never heard before, as he answered her.

‘Child—if with years you grow the guiltiest woman that ever shamed her sex, *I* shall have pardon for you. Can you not even dream what love is?’

She looked at him half fearfully, her great eyes wide-opened like a startled stag’s. Of such a tenderness as this she had no conception; yet it stirred her to a vague terror and an intense sense of worthlessness and weakness beneath the divine greatness of such a gift.

With a sudden wild awakening to its strength and her own blindness, she stretched her hands out to him with a broken cry.

‘Ah! Who will ever care for me like that again?’

For this one instant the supreme value of this priceless benediction outweighed with her all lower and baser things. She saw, in that one moment, that never, so long as her life should last, would such a love as this be hers again.

A delirious hope flashed on him. He caught her hands against his breast, and held them there with convulsive force.

‘Would that love suffice to you, Viva? If you wandered with me always—were never severed from me—would you sigh then for the golden gifts of the rich, or the triumphs of Coriolis?’

His eyes fastened on her face with feverish longing, with thirsty dread and desire mingled, to read his answer there. She hesitated a moment, looking up at him with innocent wonder, knowing no meaning in his question save that she should go whither-soever he went in his wanderings, as, when a child, she had so often begged to do.

‘I do not know,’ she said, tenderly, and with a tremor in the answer, for she loved him in return very fondly, though with a love, to him, well nigh more cruel than her hate would have been. ‘I am always so happy when I am with you ; only—only—it is to be great, too, that I want !’

He dropped her hands, and turned away. The hope of a moment’s span was gone.

‘Send your host to me,’ he said, briefly.

She went as he bade her slowly, musingly, with a certain terror and vague sense of loss and of remorse upon her. She forgot the errand on which he had sent her ; but went almost mechanically to her own room, and curled herself amongst its velvet cushions, and buried her face among its hothouse flowers, and cried as if her heart would break—why she could scarce have told.

She had said the truth sincerely, yet she felt that she had been heartless and ungrateful ; she felt too, though indefinitely, that in the answer she had given, she had in some way or another divorced her life from that of the one she loved best. Best, al-

though it was the thoughtless and half-cruel child's love that she rendered him; best, although the riches and glamour of the world were before him in her sight.

In her solitude she thought more sadly and more gravely of him. To go with him in his wanderings as she had used to pray to do,—she wondered how it would be with her if she did so? She remembered many happy hours spent with him in careless freedom; among the yellow wheat or the ripened vines; drifting down the river in some great cumbrous boat, that was yet so darkly picturesque, with its heavy tawny sails and loads of corn or fruit; or sitting under the broad-leaved chestnut-trees before some farmhouse door, listening while the delicate delicious music of the Straduarius echoed through the evening air, and made the very watchdog lift his head to listen. She remembered so many of those joyous seasons—life made up of them would surely be fair to the sight and the senses?

And then with him she knew her better nature reigned as it never did in his absence: she was purer, simpler, braver, nobler, beneath his influence than under any other. She knew as well as he that in this life that she now led she had deteriorated. She knew that for the sake of every better and higher thing in her she should cast off all these desires for a fate he could not give her, and surrender herself in innocence and contentment to the safety and sim-

plicity of her old life beneath his will. He had been to her in the stead of country, parentage, home, and brethren: he, he alone, as far as her memory could reach, had bestowed on her everything she had received, from the very bread that had appeased her daily hunger. And all the reward that she had given him had been to pine for an alien greatness, and to refuse to follow him through the years to come! She was hateful in her own sight; hateful and full of guilt. Her heart went out to him in childlike contrition and longing tenderness; but her pride and the lusts of her vanity drew her from him.

To wander with him always—what would it be but to be always amongst the people? True, they loved and honoured him, and his step brought gladness and mirth at his coming, as the foot of the wine-god sowed thyme and flowers wherever it fell.

But it was ever amongst the homes of the poor that he dwelt, in their fields that he laboured, in their festivities that he shared. He laughed to scorn the palaces of the rich, and would never break bread beneath a great man's roof. The dome under which he worshipped was the blue of the starlit sky; and the ears for which his melodies were breathed were the ears that through long labour had only heard the moving of scythes, or the beating of oars, or the whirling of steam-wheels, and had been deadened and deaf to the sweet sermons of music. To

be with him was to be 'of the people' for ever; for ever to be banished from the triumphs of greatness, from the luxuries of wealth.

And though the graciousness of love, and courage, and poetry, and charity, and tolerance, and peace, would be with her in the life, she still recoiled from it because it would be without the dreamy splendours and sensualities of riches, and without brilliancy in the sight of men to whom she would still be but a Waif and Stray.

'I *must* be great!' she murmured, vehemently. 'I am sure I came from greatness!'

She could not doubt it, as she raised her head and looked at her face in the mirror opposite; there were patrician pride and patrician blood in every line and hue of it, flushed though its hot cheeks were, and tear-laden its brimming eyes.

She felt herself the offspring of some mighty race, and destined to some mighty sovereignty: should she be false to these? No!—rather must she be false where every common bond of gratitude claimed fealty.



## CHAPTER VII.



RICOTRIN remained long where she had left him, his arms resting on a marble shelf beside him, and his head bent down on them.

The torture of doubt was ended ; there remained in its stead the dulness of despair.

The bird chose to spread its wings towards the glistening golden roofs of kings' palaces ;—let her go ! If she came not of her own will to find her repose and safety in his bosom, not by lure nor by prayer would he recall her.

Nevertheless, the corpse of a dead hope lay heavy on him, and its coldness chilled to ice the strong and vivid blood within him.

Yet not now, even in his own heart, did he reproach her. It had been his own folly, he deemed, to think that the free, wandering, homeless life of a man who was poor could suffice to the fancy and

needs of a fair woman-child. Yet not once did he wish he were rich or were great,—the love that would not cling to him because he could not strew its path with roses, and fill its hands with gold, was love worse than indifference in his eyes. Indifference might have been cold, but love such as this was cowardly.

An hour passed, unwittingly to him ; then the door once more unclosed and his host entered. Tricotrin started and raised himself erect ; in the dusky ruddy light of the declining day the agitation on his face was veiled.

‘ I only this moment learned that Viva had left you,’ said the Duke de Lirà. ‘ It seems she forgot your bidding until now. You find her—’

He paused ; hesitating how to put the question that was on his lips.

Tricotrin filled up the blank.

‘ Changed ?—or well ? Which would you ask ? I find her—as I thought to find her—ruined for the life with which she had been hitherto content, and ready to hurl herself to any depths from which it should be promised her she would rise enriched and great ! You have done what I foresaw would be done : I do not blame you. You have only brought out, under hothouse heat, the native evil that always sleeps in such fair frail things as she. You have thought to do well by her, doubtless ; but how is it well to make a creature, half-infant and half-

woman, loathe all that is honestly hers, and crave all that can never be hers except with dishonour?—how is it well, to make the pure bread of life taste coarse and abhorrent to her, and only the honeyed gilded confections that poison and cloy become the sole food she will feed on with appetite?’

He spoke with the swift eloquence that was always natural to him under emotion; what arrests the speech on most men’s lips brought it, burning and rapid as fire, to his. His hearer listened without anger, though it was a bohemian who rebuked him for what the world would have called a generous and most marvellous charity.

‘You do us some wrong I think,’ he said, patiently. ‘Here, the tastes that were inherent in her have developed; that is all. Is it not better they should do so, whilst yet her future is undecided and malleable, than that they should be discovered by herself and by others too late?’

‘Too late!’ echoed Tricotrin, with unconscious violence. ‘It is always too late for a child to discover that she is made for riches, and rank, and honour, when she is motherless, fatherless, nameless, and penniless! What avail is it ever for such an one to discover that she pines for a palace, and has the graces that empresses have not? What avail ever, except to lure her outward to the road where vice dresses itself as splendour, and disgrace thrones itself as a sovereign, and the woman who

counts the most honours is the woman who counts the most sins ! I see no end that is served, except such an end as this, by her learning that she passionately craves what is not hers by birth or by title, and can never be hers by purchase unless she barter her beauty for it ! ’

‘ You forget our covenant,’ interrupted the Duke de Lirà, still gently, for he interpreted aright the despair and the dread which inspired words in themselves so pregnant of offence for him, had he so chosen to read them. ‘ You cannot think us such barbarians that we can forsake this lovely child when once she has been under our roof ? I gave you my word to provide in such measure as I could for her happiness. It is I who am her debtor for having brought so much of youth, of gladness, and of freshness into my own sombre existence.’

Tricotrin flashed a searching burning glance upon him : he said nothing, but in that glance he read the other’s heart like a book,—his suspicions were confirmed.

‘ My mother has grown to attach herself to Viva,’ the nobleman pursued. ‘ She would part from her with regret ; of the girl’s own contentment you can judge for yourself. This life suits her well—let her lead it.’

‘ How ? ’—his teeth were set hard as he put the question.

‘ As she does now. I have no,—absolutely no,—

kindred. I can do as it pleases me with my wealth without wronging any. I will guarantee to her such a fortune as shall raise her above all possible neglect or need. For a year or more she can spend her time in such studies as are pleasures to her ; then when she is some few years older she shall enter the "great world," that she longs for, in such fashion as shall show to her only its brightest side. I know that for her to do this is for you to surrender all the claims on her which you justly hold as her sole friend and protector ; but it is for her own happiness, which, I think, can ill be made in any other way. If I wound you by what I say you must remember that in saying it I only keep my word.'

'I thank you ; you are very generous.'

That was all he answered as he turned and paced to and fro the length of the chamber. He knew that the words addressed to him were spoken in honour and liberality ; the acknowledgment of them was wrung from his justice ; yet he could have leapt on the man that uttered them and have strangled him, as wild beasts do their foes.

'You will prefer the assurance of her future from a woman than from a man,' pursued the other ; his sympathies were too true to let him misconstrue as offence to himself the pain that he knew his words caused. 'My mother will say to you all that I say ; in her name, not in mine, if you deem it better, can the conveyance of such wealth as we

may decide on be made over to Viva. She has attached herself to the child : it will lend a charm to her last years to see so graceful a creature about her in all the brilliance of youth. What more can I add ? Any pledge, any security, any bond you may wish I will give, and that life will go well with her I cannot doubt. She is not one of those formed to suffer ; under calamity, or poverty, or shame, she might kill herself like enough, but exist in pain or want she would never.'

'That is true,'—he paced still to and fro the chamber, his head sunk down on his chest. He knew that it was true ; that this child whom he had rescued from the dreariness of death by hunger, thirst, and the chills of the night, was of that temperament to which existence must be sweet, rich, unchequered, or else,—is cast off by rash passion in the first hour of desolation.

He knew that with himself happiness could not come to her, since in her sight that magic gift could only be summoned by a wand of gold. She desired these things which now were offered to her : though the effort were to kill him he would not seek to hold her through her gratitude, nor permit pity to approach him from those whom she selected in his stead. His pride arose to repress the evidence of pain before the man to whom her allegiance would henceforth be given, by choice and preference.

He came and stood before her host, grave,

calm, with a haughty and patient composure, beneath which all passion and all pain were alike held down in silence.

‘ You make a great offer ; a generous offer,’ he said briefly. ‘ From you moreover it is dictated by no design of a libertine, no desire of a voluptuary. I comprehend your intention, and I honour its charity. Its acceptance or its refusal lies with her whom it concerns, not with me. It were idle to affect to doubt which it will receive. Were she my daughter I should refuse, in her name, a liberality which however nobly tendered must still be an alms. But, having no sort of title to her life, I can have no justification in forcing her away from your charity, which can bestow on her the magnificence she covets, to retain her under mine, which can scarcely at its best lift her above poverty. Let your mother state to her to-night what you have stated to me ; let her then, weighing well the two, choose betwixt you and me. A thing of so much moment should not be hastily adopted or rejected. I foresee many objections to your plan : many reasons why much trouble may come to you through it ; we do not know whence she comes, nor who may some day claim her. But this is for your judgment ; not for mine.

The Duke de Lirà answered nothing. He stood, looking earnestly and with a curious wonder on the man who thus addressed him with all the tone of one

gentleman to another, though speaking of poverty and clad in the guise of a labourer. With a sudden impulse he spoke aloud the perplexity that had baffled him from the hour when he had first seen the revolutionist, with the hymn of the Marseillaise in his lips, and the red flag above his head, drive back the plunderers from out his court of honour.

‘Tricotrin! *what are you?* Forgive me the insolence, if insolent it be, for sake of the friendship I would bear you if you let me? A bohemian, a genius, a scholar, a democrat, a wanderer, a man who might be everything, and who chooses to be nothing. What can one make of you?’

Tricotrin’s fine delicate lips laughed slightly.

‘Sir—the People do not share your perplexity. I would make myself intelligible to your Order, if I cared for their comprehension. I am no mystery that I know of; save that truly a man who does not care for greed or for gain is an anomaly in this day! But I do not care to speak of myself. I thank you for your offer of friendship; but I make no friendships. And from your order to mine they would savour too much of patronage for my taste. Let us rather conclude the matter which alone unites us,—for a season. You desire absolutely to adopt Viva into your family and your station?’

‘I do so.’

‘You remember that contingencies may arise that I cannot avert? No one knows whence she

came, nor by whom she was born or begotten ; there is the possibility at any time of claimants arising ; specially so when she is of prominence in the world.'

'That we must hazard. I think that there is little. I have had fresh inquiries instituted whence you discovered her ; but there appears no clue whatever to her parentage or her abandonment. And the crime of such abandonment will keep silent its perpetrators. Moreover,—who has seen her in that little chalet by the Loire ? A few peasants only. There are indeed Coriolis and her young lover, but we can guard her from their sight until such time as, with her womanhood, she shall have so changed that they will never dream of her identity. Unless you choose to reveal it, none need recognize her in the new life she will lead.'

'I shall not do so. At the same time let it be understood that I cannot guard you or her from such possibilities. And I deem them more perilous than you do. Women like Coriolis never forget aught—save their God. Nor on the other hand will I surrender my right to have free access to her whenever I may deem fit. Account for my connection with her as you please : but I will not be debarred from some watch over her life.'

'Heaven forbid you should be. If she ever forget what she owes to you——'

'She will forget it. It is not remembrance of

that kind that I need. But I desire to have, always, the power to judge for myself of how far from, or how near to, happiness she be. You may trust me to exercise the power in such wise as will be best for her. If I do not thank you as you may deem you deserve, believe that I do not the less appreciate the gentleness and benevolence which move you. I leave you to acquaint her yourself of your will with her. You can then propose to her all that you desire, and see if she accept your guardianship : there can be no doubt that she will do so.'

As he turned to move away his host stretched out his hand to arrest him.

'Stay ! Tricotrin, if it give you pain, if it cause you regret, to part with her to our keeping, I do but ill repay the debt I owe to you ?'

'You owe me none. I forced my people from plunder and incendiarism : think you I should have done otherwise if they had attacked the house of my enemy ?'

'No matter, I do not hold what you did so lightly. Well as they loved you they were nigh turning on you for thwarting them, like tigers baulked of their spoil. And,—if to lose the child you have cherished cause you one pang of regret—'

Tricotrin stopped the phrase on his lips with a smile that had an irony more mournful than tears.

'Pshaw ! Is there aught that we love that does not stab us, somewise, soon or late ? There is no

serpent, without, that can sting half so hard as the tenderness in us !'

Then, his pride forbidding him even so much as these words of reproach and lament, he laughed as he passed to the door.

'I am a wanderer, and have no ties to be ruptured. You solve a problem that began to grow knotted and vexatious in my hands. I should thank you more than I have done. Without you Viva would most likely have passed to the path of Coriolis. Her rescue is my obligation. Adieu.'

He was gone as the farewell was spoken : in his hand was the injured Arlecchino. Even a trifle that pleased her had worth in his eyes ; and a promise concerning a toy had its bond on him even though the toy were his rival.

As he passed an open door a soft silvery luminous thing sprang through it towards him ; it was the form of Viva, in the airy grace of her evening apparelling.

'You are not going ?' she whispered, 'Madame receives to-night, and they have dressed me early, —I want you to look at me !'

His breath came and went, swift and hard. While his heart was breaking over her, this frivolous thing only heeded the sweep of laces and the shimmer of silks !

'You were fairer in your vine garland,' he said briefly.

She gave a sigh of impatience.

‘Oh! how can you say so? Just look at me, I am all snow and silver like a fairy!’

And she shook herself, and whirled round lightly, that the gossamer tissues might gleam in the light and float on the air. A strange dreamy memory of the German Willis of legend who dances in the midsummer moonlight, and with whom whosoever dance also must perish ere dawn, came to him in the moment, as such weird fancies will come to minds of the strongest and clearest.

‘Nature has given you beauty. Take heed how you use it,’ he said wearily. ‘But—you are too young for these pleasures, Viva?’

‘Oh! They only let me go for one hour, just to see and be seen,’ she murmured, with the tears still wet on her flushed cheeks. ‘And it is so beautiful there! and the great ladies caress me, though I think that they hate me in their hearts! and the great nobles tell me they never saw anything half so lovely as I am. And I think it is true when I look in the mirrors: there is no one like me!’

The confession was so naïf; the vanity as yet so innocent; even in that hour he could not choose but smile at them, though the smile was very mournful.

‘From the world they prepare you for and the world of Coriolis there is little difference save a

glazing of lip-honour! But—what can they call you in this house to their guests?’

‘Only Viva:—there is mystery kept up about me. It is thought that I am the grandchild of a dead friend of the Duchess’s whom she has discovered in an obscure position. Nothing definite is told. Madame likes to have it all shadowy and vague; and to excite people’s interest without conceding anything to their curiosity.’

‘So! You take kindly already to the lies of the great world?’

Viva coloured: the dauntless haughty nature of the child was instinctively and inherently truthful, and he had trained her to look on falsehood as the disgrace of the coward.

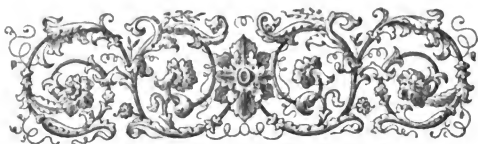
‘I do not say anything,’ she murmured. ‘It is supposed so, and I am not to contradict it. Madame tells me that it would never do to allow it to be divined that I am a—foundling.’

The last abhorred word was very low; it could not be consoled to her even by her own convictions of her splendid though hidden lineage, which she never doubted would soon or late blossom out into some magnificence of heritage and celebrity.


‘No?’ he said, with a grave tenderness in his tone that moved her strangely. ‘And yet, though you will deem me cruelly harsh to say so, I doubt if it would not be better for your future if that one memory of what you were could be kept ever before you! I see you to-morrow,—farewell.’

She stood, irresolute and remorseful, as he passed away : then a strain of music caught her ear, and she turned to a mirror near.

‘I shall have no beauty if I cry !’ she thought, and she choked back the sobs which were fast rising in her throat as she looked at her own reflection.



## CHAPTER VIII.

‘HE has accepted ? It is quite natural she should have done so.’

He spoke quietly, with a grave courtesy, where he stood on the morrow in the chamber of the Duchess de Lirà. He was quick to conceal all emotion, impassioned and impulsive though his nature was ; and he came before them calm, careless, full of the ready wit and of the easy negligence of his habitual manner. His temper made him fling off pain ; and, having once resolved to surrender her up to those who virtually purchased her by superior wealth, he was none the less resolved to conceal from them that the surrender cost him aught. The intelligence that she had thus chosen was no blow to him : he had not dreamed that she would choose otherwise. All that she desired they could bestow ; nothing that she desired could he accord her : and

he knew well how the affections of such feminine Caprices as Viva were guided by their sunny and unconscious egotism.

The old aristocrat studied him with well-concealed wonder. She knew of the debt that her son had owed to him in the times of the revolution; but she abhorred every form of revolution, and had imagined him a coarse eccentric man of the people who could be dismissed as soon as his Waif were purchased from him, as easily as the husk of a chestnut is thrown away, when the sweet snowy kernel is extracted. She was lost in the same amazement and wrath as had at the first moved her, at finding in the bohemian whom she had thought to relieve by taking a burden from his hands, a man who dictated terms to her, and made the presence of a foundling in her house as grave a matter as the betrothal of a princess, and spoke to her with all the dignity and power of an equal, whilst he fascinated her by an irresistible charm she could neither analyze nor dispute.

Though worldly-wise and haughty to coldness, the aged Duchess had a certain gentleness of heart, and a great generosity. The desire of her beloved and only living son was law to her; and although she had viewed at first with aversion and disgust his attraction towards a nameless, and doubtless bastard, child, she had ended by feeling a woman's tenderness for the child herself; whose native grace,

pride, and refinement, assimilated themselves so rapidly to her own. Her son's desire had been at first inexplicable and most unwelcome to her: but now, there had come into her thoughts a vague conception which she did not like to brood upon, yet which insensibly served to reconcile her to his wishes: the threatened extinction of his race was a great misery to her, her craving for its perpetuation still stronger than her pride; as it seemed he could never be wooed by those of his own rank,—since the days of his earliest youth when a cruel treachery had taught him his alienation from their sex,—would it not be better that he should wed even with a peasant than leave his name to perish?

If this were ever to be so, the preparation and commencement for it must be, she resolved, the absolute and unalterable banishment of all things connected with the girl's past life. Therefore her chagrin and her wrath were great, when in the man whom she projected to dismiss for ever, she encountered as proud a spirit and as resolute a will as her own, one who scarcely thanked her for her splendid offer, and who dictated conditions as though he, not she, were the patron and the donor.

At his last stipulation, she, had it not been for her son, would have bade him take back his foundling and make a servant, a gypsy, an actress of her, what he would: yet the last stipulation which offended her so deeply was but this:

‘I have only one thing more to add,’ said Tricotrin, when their interview drew nigh its end. ‘It is to stipulate that I, myself, shall never be denied access to her. You can account for my knowledge of her as seems best to you. I have spoken my desire that she should never be painfully reminded of her past, or led to feel that she is deemed of an inferior class to that in which she will henceforth move; you may be certain therefore that my presence will never be forced on her, unadvisedly or inopportunately. But I will not surrender the right to judge for myself of her happiness or unhappiness. I will not relinquish the power of ascertaining the truth concerning her welfare. I will not consent to become as a stranger to her.’

‘It is impossible,’ commenced Madame de Lirà; but her son, standing beside her chair, laid his hand on hers:

‘Nay, Madame, it is but just,’ he said quietly.

‘It is but just,’ repeated Tricotrin, calmly, ‘to myself and to her. All that I know of her history you know; and that all is nothing. But I have taken, of my own will, the maintenance and direction of her life. Having once assumed those, I should err to her if I did not continue to hold, at least, the ability to know how life goes with her in her future. I have said, and I repeat it if that be needful, that I shall exercise the right with all due regard to her position or your prerogative; but the

right itself I shall not relinquish. She will see me very rarely, very rarely indeed, if she be happy ; but whenever she needs me—if ever she needs me—I shall be there.'

'Surely!' interposed the Duke, still with that gentle touch of his hand on hers, entreating silence from his mother. 'Do not think that we seek to teach her either ingratitude or oblivion.'

'There will be no need to teach them. Both will come self-sown. Nay! Do not think I say this either in irony or blame. She is human; why should we expect her to be above humanity? I thank you for your kindness towards her. I see in it a beneficence to myself. For evil would have touched her in obscurity and want of riches. You have saved her from the chance—the certainty—that in the only life she could have led through me she would one day have cursed me that I ever came between her and the death that was allotted to her in her infancy. To you, Madame, I need say nothing. You are a woman,—I need not remind you that she is worse than motherless. You are of gentle blood,—I need not bid you remember that a scornful word, which is a jest to the well-born, can sting like a serpent what is desolate and dependent. You are aged,—I need not solicit from you sympathy and patience with the fanciful enthusiasms and wayward ways of youth? The gift of your gold will be the generosity that the world will

appraise. It is the gift of your love and your gentleness that I would bespeak for Viva? An old peasant-woman gave them; they were all she had to give. But—unless they be added to your treasures likewise, the child, amidst riches, will remain poor indeed. I will bid her farewell now; and then—she has her will, she is yours.’

His voice was calm and unbroken throughout the words, yet there was an accent in them that thrilled through the hearts of his hearers; and, as she heard, dimmed with a strange unwonted emotion the keen eyes of the chill, imperious, disdainful protectress of what had for ever abandoned him.

‘He dictated to *me!*’ she murmured, as he quitted the chamber, moved as she had never been through many years, beneath whose ice the love she had borne her son had been the only living thing of warmth. ‘And you called him a man of the people, my son!’

‘He calls himself so—’

‘Of the people? Of the mob? Ridiculous! He has the voice of a man born to rule; he has the grace and the negligence of courts. What is there of the populace about him?—’

‘Nothing save his sympathies. They are wholly with the people.’

‘Bah! That is no rule. One is sometimes tired of oneself—of one’s order. How else would you get your Egalités, your Mirabeaux? There are con-

servative workpeople ; there are democratic princes. You know nothing else of him ?’

‘ Nothing. No one knows anything of Tricotrin.’

‘ Tricotrin ! Pshaw ! Tricotrin ! Is that a name ? It means nothing ! ’ answered the old patrician, with impatience. ‘ That man has borne some other name ; that man must have been noble once ! ’

‘ Why so ? He is a scholar, an artist, a genius, but a bohemian, nevertheless, to the core. For the twenty years and more that I have heard of him he has been simply what he is, a lawless wanderer of the “ école buissonnière. ” ’

Madame de Lirà shook her silvered head.

‘ No matter ! He must have *race* in him. Heraldry may lie ; but voices do not. Low people make money, drive in state, throng to palaces, receive kings at their tables by the force of gold ; but their antecedents always croak out in their voices. They either screech or purr ; they have no clear modulations. Besides, their women always stumble over their train, and their men bow worse than their servants. But this man, look you,—he has high blood in his veins, however he come by it. And—he suffers.’

Her acute and penetrative acumen had pierced to the truth, though with it she had never once seemed to have a pulse of sympathy. Her son paced slowly and musingly to and fro her chamber, with an anxious shadow on his face.

‘I hope not,’ he said, with a pang of self-remorse. ‘I hope to heaven not! I have done for the best—’

‘Bah!’ murmured the Duchess, with her delicate irony. ‘Do not use those words. Nobody ever takes refuge in them except when they divine they have—done wrong. Half the misery of this world is made by persons “doing for the best,” instead of leaving others alone to do just as they choose! It is “best” for her, of course—the pretty, heartless thing. But for the man,—it is a little bitter. Your silver Harlequin and my gold shoe-buckles outweigh him, and all his years of care, with her; it is a little bitter—that!’

‘It must be so—indeed!’ murmured her son; and for his good deed he felt a deeper remorse than many feel for brutal crimes.

He had gone to her where she had stayed during the hour of their converse, in a dainty, radiant little room that was called hers. She was kneeling by one of its couches, with her head bowed down upon the pile of cushions, as he entered. She had chosen as her desire and her ambition dictated, chosen as her vanity entreated, chosen as the evil spirit that her Prince Fainéant had awakened in her, tempted and urged her to do. And yet there were sorrow and shame on her; she felt unworthy in her own sight. In the moment of her triumph she felt humiliated; in the very seizure of her wishes she felt disappointed.

Though vain things too often obscured it, the core of her heart was pure and brave; its fibres were of nobler stuff than the egotisms and the frivolities that surrounded it. There were dauntlessness and truth enough there, still, to make her know that she had acted basely; that the humblest peasant-girl, working in the vineyards in summer-drougths for her own existence, was more near to true dignity and freedom than was she; that the coarsest shepherd or swineherd, keeping his herds upon the plains, and giving of his poor wage to the parent or the benefactor who had reared him, was nobler and more grateful than herself.

Her pride told her that she should refuse all alms however disguised in a magnificent liberality; her conscience told her that she should reject all temptations, however glittering and alluring, which would banish from her the lives that had sheltered and succoured her own. She was well aware that she was won by the purples and fine linens, the brilliancies and the aggrandizements of the bribe by which she was enthralled; and she was worthless in her own eyes.

For the second time in her life she shrank from the presence of the only living creature that she loved; in his gaze she felt an accusation; in his voice she heard the accents of a judge. Though she had done nought against him she felt as though she had betrayed him; she had forsaken him; she had denied

him; she had been ashamed of her allegiance to him. She knew that she had sinned, as sinned the faithless disciple who denied his Master.

The bread of life, and the food of the spirit, had alike come to her from his hand, and from his voice; he had bestowed on her daily bread through his charity, and had raised her soul towards high imperishable things by his words. She owed him a greater debt than the nourishment of her mortal form; she owed him the rescue of her mind from the sloughs of ignorance and vice;—and the way that she paid this debt was to desert him for the bribes of wealth! Her truer nature told her that, although following in its flight the gilded arrow of ambition, she had in that desertion left the greatness which was pure and lofty for the greatness which was a toy of tinsel.

To be true, to preserve truth unstained at any cost, had been the one lesson he had ever taught her; and she would be henceforth a lie—delicate, sunlit, harmless indeed, but still a lie to herself and the world.

When the vine-wreath had dropped, crushed and broken on the floor, Viva would have given the world, if she had owned it, to bring back the bloom and the freshness to the bright crown that she had scorned because the people had woven it, and a great man had seen her wear it. Her old child-life that she had despised and rebelled against

because it was obscure and simple, and led amidst peasantry,—would she sigh as vainly for it, she wondered, as she had done for the lost grape-garland?

Yet she cast it from her heedlessly and willingly.

Until the vine-leaves of youth are faded, who knows their value or sweetness? None, alas! whilst yet the violet down is on the grapes, whilst yet the hair that they crown is unsilvered by time.

Some vague sense of the bitter fact which corrodes all human life—the fact that desire is everything, fruition or possession but little—came to Viva, in the granting of her wish, as it comes to the lover, the monarch, the bride, the hero, the statesman, the poet, all alike, when that which they have sighed for, and thirsted for, lies feasted on to satiety within their tired grasp.

Viva had gained the ‘great world;’ and because she had gained it, all the old things of her lost past grew unalterably sweet to her now that they no longer could be hers. The brown, kind, homely, tender face of Grand’mère; the gambols of white and frolicsome Bébé; the woods where, with every spring, she had filled her arms with sheaves of delicate primroses; the quaint little room with its strings of melons and sweet herbs, its glittering brass and pewter, its wood-fire with the soup-pot simmering above the flame; the glad free days in the vineyard, and on the river, with the winds blowing fragrance from over the clover,

and flax, and the acacias and lindens ; nay, even the old, quiet, sleepy hours within the convent-walls, lying on the lush unshaven grass, while the drowsy bells rang to vespers or compline ;—all became suddenly precious and dear to her when once she knew that they had drifted away from her for evermore.

But never yet so dear or so precious that they made her waver in her choice. The young wood-dove fluttered her white wings in impatience for their flight from the forest-covert to the rose aisles of kings' gardens. And he—thanked God that he had found strength, against himself, to bid her go where heart, and fancy, and desire had already taken flight, as he beheld her on that morning in which, for the last time, he was with her as the guide and guardian of her life.

She had been robbed from him, less by the tempting of others than by the discontent of her own soul. It was cruel as the serpent's tooth to relinquish the grace of her caressing ways, the fairness of her perfect loveliness, the watch of her bright and wayward intellect, to others.

He who loved Mankind, but who had long had no special love within his heart, had grown in the last few months to passionately cherish and desire her. Yet to hold by force, what he could not gain from fidelity, would have been an egotism and a baseness impossible to him.

'You think me wicked !' she murmured, as he

stood beside her. 'You think me ungrateful—selfish—full of greed? I told you the other night that I would not take their chairity, however splendid it might be—and I have taken it. I have—'

'Hush!' he said, gravely. 'Speak of it no more—never more. You have chosen—chosen where your desire already had run before you. You have not known when you were happy; such ignorance is ingratitude to fate. You are happy now, with such happiness as comes from granted wishes; be wise enough to know it.'

'Ah, yes!' she said, with a sudden vibration of passionate repentance in her voice. 'I have my wishes; but I feel weak and guilty in the joy of them. Just so I longed for jewels; but when that young prince gave me them, although I loved them, I never felt at peace. And it is just so now!'

'Child,—what title have you, do you think, to escape the doom of all humanity? You desire—you possess—and you find repentance and satiety already lying, in wild justice, at the core of the thing you have coveted. You are no exception; you have the common fate of all mortality.'

'But then it is because what I desired was wrong! When I wished for the vine-feast, when I wished for your coming, when I wished for the swallows' return, when I wished for a sail on the water, it was not so;—I was so happy when my wishes came—'

‘Because your desires then were innocent. Nay, they are now no guilt, but they are corroded, they are born of envy and the lusts of wealth; and their advent is not peace, because your conscience is in unrest at their purchase.’

‘Because I know myself so false to you!’ she cried, in that breathless terror of a sudden remorse. ‘Because, while I love all these things that I gain, I know myself so base, so unworthy, so unfaithful to you who have been to me in the stead of father, mother, brethren, friends, and home! Because I know that all my lifetime spent in service and fidelity to you could not repay you all the long years’ debt I owe! I choose the life they offer me,—I cannot help but choose it, it draws me to it with a sorcery. I pine, I long, I thirst to be in greatness, and if I had refused it and had gone back with you, the evil in me would have made me vile, the longing in me would have made me restless, the discontent in me would have made me your torture, not your blessing! I cannot help what I do. Forgive me for it if you can!’

The impetuosity, broken and vehement, of the words, but ill told the conflict in her heart; the conflict betwixt the irresistible delights of that new world which tempted her, and the remorseful clinging of her old affections to their severed ties. He heard in silence; the time was past when it could give him either hope or dread; when it could move him to expectation or disappointment.

Through all these years he had taken thought of her,—the young forsaken creature for whom no other cared,—he had denied himself that she might enjoy ; he had put down the wine-cup untasted that she might have bread, oftentimes ; he had broken in the careless laughter-loving indolence of his temper to the deliberate acceptance of labour, that the trust he had self-assumed might be borne out by her maintenance. And all this was counted as nought ; all this was swept aside as though it had never been, by the first proffer of a rich man's gold !

But it was his nature to give lavishly and royally ; it was his nature to appraise as nothing the good that he did to others ; therefore no word of reproach escaped him where he stood alone with her, on this morning when she accepted as a charmed gift from a beauteous fate the life that would sever her from him for ever. One thing only, in which would have been for her the deepest reproach of all, had not her self-absorption prevented her being stung by it, did he ask her. It was simply,

‘ Viva,—do not wholly forget me ! ’

As it was she felt in that one moment of its utterance a pang such as rarely struck through the playfulness and pride, the vanity and airy wilfulness, of her nature.

She looked upward with impassioned feeling.

‘Forget you ! If ever I do may God himself forget me !’

He shrank slightly, as though the future veiled from her was clear to him ; as though oblivion of himself were so sure and so inevitable that in her words he heard her self-invocation of abandonment by her God.

‘Make no rash vows,’ he said gently. ‘Do not touch the future ; let it come as it will. Though you do utterly forget me, may all that I wish for you be with you to your life’s end.’

‘But how *could* I forget you !’ she cried, as if in terror at that doom which to him seemed so certain, and to her so impossible. ‘Could I grow so base, so cruel, so vile, so brutally unworthy of all your love and pity ?’

He smiled : the smile she had so often seen of late ; of a sadness she could not gauge, of an irony she could not comprehend, of a bitterness she could not fathom.

‘Nay ; you will only grow—a beautiful woman and worldly. No more ! An ingrate ? Well ! are you not that, my little one, to the good old creature you call Grand’mère ? Her heart hungers for you, you know that well, yet for sake of Madame la Duchesse, and the dresses, and the pleasures, and the jewelled toys, you will leave Grand’mère to sorrow alone, and be solaced as best she may !’

Viva's face crimsoned.

'It is selfish, I know. It is wicked!' she murmured. 'But Grand'mère always said "never mind me, my child; do what pleases you;" and in a little while I will get them to let me go and see her, and I will show her all my pretty things, and take her some presents, such as she would—'

'No!' he interrupted her with an accent that was almost savage in its intensity. 'Do not insult what you desert! Your absence will shut the last lingering light out of her life; do not think to heal the wound that you have made by gifts bought with rich people's gold!'

She was frightened and stilled by his sudden violence; with it there seemed to break on her all the strength and the value of this great love, all its grandeur and its rarity, with which she had played, knowing no more of its force and its beauty than a little child playing with sapphires and diamonds knows of their worth. With a sudden impulse of remorse, and fear, and repentance, she nerved herself to sacrifice all her ambitions and all her delights.

'If you wish it let me go home!' she cried, in sudden and sincere renunciation. 'If it pain you let me stay there always! I would not give you an hour's sorrow for all the bribes of France!'

But in the cry there was only a love that entreated to stay near him for his sake, not its own; a love

as of a child's petulant pliant affection; a love that to the burning passions of the man was well-nigh worse than none; a drop of dew when he thirsted for the ocean, a gleam of light making the darkness greater, a Tantalus touch upon the lips of the fruit denied to them, a ray of the pale moon when he longed for the full rich glow of southern suns.

But all that he felt he restrained.

'Not so,' he answered her. 'The die is cast and you must go, Viva. And—to wish for the time to come when you should desire to return would be to wish your dreams false, your faith betrayed, your paradise poisoned by the serpent, your glorious hopes all cheated and misled. It were to love you ill to wish you back at such a cost. No! As you are happy in your new life so will you forget your old; as you go nearer the fruition of your prayers so will you go further from me. So be it, if for your joy.'

Once again there stole upon her with a sense of terror, and of guilt in her own unworthiness, some perception of the majesty and the purity of this martyred passion which asked nothing for itself but all for her. She trembled greatly, like one who leaves hold of some long-tried and never-failing support to plunge down into an unknown abyss.

He saw that, and in his infinite self-sacrifice hastened to comfort her, and to lead her thoughts from what he suffered.

‘Now listen to a few last words,’ he said softly, with an effort, so successful, at his old familiar tone, that she was stilled and reassured. ‘You go to what you desire: you will have riches, luxuries, gaieties, brilliancies, all around you; you will have indulgence and, in a year or two more, homage. But, Viva, none of these things will suffice to you unless your own heart be at peace. You have a noble nature in much; but you have grave errors that will mar all the rest if they be allowed to grow and to strengthen. You have delight in your loveliness,—that is natural: but the illness of a week, as I have reminded you ere now, may sweep it away for ever. How will it be with you then if your soul has been anchored on the allurements of your face? Win regard and attachment on something surer. You are too proud, and everything in your new existence will tend to heat and to pamper that fault. If you have any tenderness for me you will strive against that besetting sin of yours, or it will make you very cold, very cruel, very arrogant, very avaricious! It will kill all the divinity in you as surely as the frost kills the flowers. Nor will it, like the frost, leave the good root below unseen, but still not slain, to blossom out again. For the nature frozen by the ice of greed, and vanity, and unscrupulous ambition, there comes no spring: but all is night and winter there. Keep only such pride as shall ever rise above all taint of falsehood or of meanness, and gain you

that true dignity, a stainless name. To Madame de Lirà, who henceforth will have authority over you, you will be gentle, grateful, with such reverence as becomes the young to the old, and never forgetful that you owe her very much more than it will be in your power ever to repay. And for the rest, —well!—the future must bring you what it will, but you will have the surest shield to meet it, if you gain for yourself that temper which adversity cannot appal, and prosperity cannot exalt, which knows not fear as it knows not vanity, and which in trial is dauntless, as in happiness it is gentle and pitiful of others. I have read you a homily, Viva mine, but I do not think it will be altogether forgotten; and if—as you have said—you deem that there is any question of debt betwixt you and me, and you would care to reward me, and to pleasure me for the little I have done for your childhood, show me thus thy sincerity and fidelity;—by curbing what I who love you best have blamed, and by keeping your glorious nature uncorrupted from the world. When you are tempted, Viva, by your beauty, and glad pride, and brilliant besetting sins, that seem to have no evil to you, because they are masked in such proud and witching disguises, think of this that I have asked of you;—if I have had place in your heart one hour you will have strength to resist temptation then.'

His voice had deepened from the playfulness with

which he had first spoken, into a grave and earnest softness, but into no other tenderness than that which he had ever had of old with her; they were wise and gentle counsels, and all that he called, not unjustly, her more glorious nature awoke and stirred in instant and ardent response.

‘I will, I will!’ she murmured passionately. ‘I will remember every word; every time that I am proud, and wayward, and wicked, I will think of you; I will try to be all you will; I will pray night and day to God to make me so! And,—as for forgetting you,—Viva will never love any one in the wide world, as she loves you. Never, never, never!’

Tricotrin did not answer, but he laid his hand on her fair bowed head, with a smile infinitely beautiful, infinitely mournful.

He foresaw the future more clearly than she. There was a long silence in the little luxurious chamber; while the winter sun fell through the deep-hued painted panes, and touched them where they stood with light; then she clung to him with her old caressing grace: ‘Play to me once—once!’

He looked on her, still with the same smile.

‘Child! however thy new life ruins and indulges thee, and strews thy path with roses, thou wilt not be more spoilt than thou hast been as a Waif!’

Then he bent his head, letting her desire be his

law; and that music, which had given its hymn for the vintage-feast of the Loire, and which had brought back the steps of the suicide from the river-brink in the darkness of the Paris night, which sovereigns could not command, and which held peasants entranced by its spell, thrilled through the stillness of the chamber.

Human in its sadness, more than human in its eloquence, now melancholy as the *Miserere* that sighs through the gloom of a cathedral midnight, now rich as the glory of the after-glow in Egypt, a poem beyond words, a prayer grand as that which seems to breathe from the hush of mountain solitudes when the eternal snows are lighted by the rising of the sun,—the melody of the violin filled the silence of the closing day.

The melancholy, ever latent in the vivid natures of men of genius, is betrayed and finds voice in their Art. Goethe laughs with the riotous revellers, and rejoices with the summer of the vines, and loves the glad abandonment of women's soft embraces, and with his last words prays for Light. But the profound sadness of the great and many-sided master mind thrills through and breaks out in the intense humanity, the passionate despair of Faust; the melancholy and the yearning of the soul are there.

With *Tricotrin* they were uttered in his music.

Other arts Earth still mingles with and profanes; passion is in the poet's words, the senses wake with

the painter's voluptuous hues, and the sculptor dreams but of the divine beauty of a woman's form; but with music the soul escapes all bondage, and rises where the world has no share, unclogged and unaccompanied. His heart spoke in those wild, pathetic, nameless melodies as it never spoke in human language: he who should have read them aright would have read this man's life by its master-key.

As Viva listened to the harmonies which had been her dearest delight from her earliest years, the slow tears gathered in her eyes, the flush faded from her face leaving it very pale, she pushed back the shining masses of hair off her brow, and stood as she had stood long before in her infancy, when the Straduarus had decided the fate of the Waif.

Her future seemed to float before her in the rich fantastic passionate waves of sound that filled the stillness,—that future of sunlight, that future of sovereignty!—and still ever, through all the glory of the melodies, one under-note of deepest sadness seemed to whisper that in all the life to which she went she should find no love that would equal, in its measure and its sacrifice, this love that had sheltered and shone on her childhood, this love which she had now forsaken.

Then, suddenly, the wondrous magic of the



music ceased, and dropped, and died; and Viva threw herself on her knees before him.

‘Ah! if I heard that music always, I should never be proud and vain and wayward; I should love and pity all the world; I should do your will and God’s!’

Tricotrin smiled, and the smile was like his melodies.

‘Viva mine, were we all what we are in our holiest moments, we were all God-like! Treasure the music in thy heart then; so will it be thy guardian-angel. So shall I have *one* gift to give thee! And now—farewell!’

At that one word, all the anguish of severance came on her; she loved him with fervent, tender, clinging affection, though she loved yet more dearly her vanity and her pride. She had dwelt joyously away from him because she had been so sure she could go back to him; but now that she had to part from him, and from the home that he had given her, without power to return to them, the fondness that she bore for both conquered every other feeling, and she sobbed as though her very heart were breaking, her head bowed on his breast, her hair flung over his arms.

She did not feel the shudder that ran through him at her touch; she only heard the gentleness of the voice upon her ear.

‘My child of chance! The fairies call thee to their Avillion where are no toil, no pain, no shame, to gall thy heart and fret thy pride. No poor grape-garland to be heavy on thy brows, no lives of labour about thee to make thee dread a great man’s sneer. Go with a happy heart, and spoil not thy present by looking backward at thy past. The past, however bright when it was “present,” is ever dark with vain desire when it lies behind us, like lands from whose sky the sun has long gone down. Remember that!’

She made him no reply; but silently clung to to him weeping in a very convulsion of love and of repentance; a summer tempest soon to pass, yet none less vivid and desolating, because fated to be evanescent.

He looked mutely down upon her; and where her head was hidden on his breast she could not see the yearning passion that his eyes spoke, for one moment unrestrainedly, because it knew itself unread and unsuspected.

‘Ah, true to thy sex!’ he murmured bitterly. ‘Thou mournest me now, a day hence and I shall be forgotten!’

A burning flush dyed her face as she lifted it with impetuous eagerness of denial.

‘Never, never, never! I shall never forget you till I die!’

The smile that made her tremble, why she could


not have told, was still upon his lips—the smile of so much tenderness, of such little faith.

‘You will die early then! Nay! live in joy ever, though not a thought of me pass over thee. My child—my love! Farewell!’

He held her one moment longer in his embrace, one moment longer pressed his lips on hers; then, ere she knew it, drew her still closer yet, once more, thrust her quickly from his arms and left her;—their lives were cut in twain for ever.



## CHAPTER IX.

ILD winds were driving snow across the vineyards and the plains in blinding white sheets of powder; the swollen river was black and angry, rushing in stormy tide and eddy between its brimming banks; in spots where its torrent had overflowed, a dark sullen sheet of water spread over submerged meadows or ruined gardens; the night was tempestuous, starless, heavy-laden with snow: through it Tricotrin passed, insensible to the furious blasts, the icy cold, the perils of the flood, the fatigue of every step.

When here and there the dim reflection of some lantern, hung upon some wayside cross to guide the way of travellers, fell upon his face, it was very pale, and his eyes looked straight forward into the unbroken gloom, unblinded by the sleet that drove against them: in his breast curled Mistigri, and

with one arm he held her there and sheltered her from the night.

He made his way, by instinct and by habit, to one familiar place ; the great chestnut branches were groaning in the gale, the rush of the river below the rocky slope was like the swelling hoarseness of the sea, the wind was tearing the ivy from the stones where it had clung so long, and scaring the birds in terror from its shelter.

There was a ray of yellow light streaming from an oval hole in the shutter ; through it the homely interior was visible, ruddy with the cheerfulness of burning wood, and with the form of an old peasant-woman alone within it. Grand'mère sat, by the wood-fire on her hearth, half-asleep in the twilight, her high white head-dress nodding to and fro, the chestnuts cracking in the embers, the white cat *Bebée* purring in the warmth.

She started, and clicked across the floor in her wooden shoes, as a knock came on the door of her dwelling. She threw it wide open with her oil lamp held above her head, and gave a loud glad cry ; then she trembled till the lamp rays flickered like a candle flame blown about in the wind.

‘Where is the child ?’ she asked.

‘The child is well, Grand’mère.’

Then he entered and shook off the snow that had fallen on his beard and blouse ; and took the little shivering *Mistigri* from his bosom, and put her

kindly down beside Bébé, and unstrapped his knapsack and laid it on a wooden settle. At last with an exceeding gentleness he turned and took the two old withered hands within his own, and looked down into the eyes that had watched him with such mute pathetic entreaty.

‘You can bear pain, Grand’mère?’

She gazed at him with a hard, fixed, agonized regard that searched his very heart.

‘Paris has taken her!’ she said slowly, with a terrible bitterness. ‘I have known it long. Paris is fed with all our blood, all our beauty, all our youth, all our innocence:—Paris is never quieted. The children come to the birth and lie at the breast only to be devoured by her when they have fairness or strength in their frame!’

Then casting her serge gown over her head as a matron of Rome cast her robes, she turned from him and leaned against the wall in silent agony. To her there was no need to say more: Paris, that fatal, beautiful, cruel, pitiless thing that drew all lives within its murderous embrace had taken the child—all was told.

Tricotrin laid his hand on her shoulder.

‘Grand’mère, it is not so bad as you think. Believe me it is well with Viva.’

The old woman uncovered her head and looked at him with all the fire of her youth flashing through the slow salt tears of age.

‘So *they* said,—each one of them! My noble boys! It was well with them they thought—the city was so grand, and the wage so good, and the mirth so gay, how should they have deemed otherwise? Paris wore a smiling front to them; she smiles always, until she sucks the life out of their veins, like the bat that fans men to slumber to kill them. Antoine wrote me it was so well with him! he fought for liberty, he was kissed on the mouth by fair women who called him a hero, he dreamed of freedom for all France, and of the love and the patience of God breathed into the hard souls of men. That was how she lured him, that Paris, whose stones drank his blood. And he died in his youth, with the balls fired into his breast!

‘I know—I know! But Viva—’

‘She has gone where he went!—where his brethren went!’ she interrupted him fiercely, every line of her brown withered face quivering with grief and with passion. ‘They could never come back; nor could she, I know well. It is ever the same with Paris—she draws them all in, the youths and the maidens, and when she has got them she pits them one against each other to ruin them all—the men to tempt the maidens, breathing lust in their ear, and pressing gold in their hands; the women to lure the youths, kissing them blind with bought kisses, and teaching them the pleasure that kills! How should she come back? Can the clay

come unburnt from the furnace?—Can the callow bird return from the throat of the squirrel that has drawn down and devoured it? Why did you not slay her with your own hand rather than take her to that gilded and honeyed death that steals the soul with the body?’

Then once more she turned her head from him, and wept—wept as the aged weep, without hope.

He waited awhile till her grief, wrought almost to frenzy, should have grown calmer.

In the light of the hearth Mistigri trembled and watched them with her black and melancholy eyes, and stole closer to Bebé, who, himself, slept and purred on, indifferent, so long as the fire burned bright to warm him.

After a while he spoke, and told her the truth as it stood, and strove to soften the blow, as best it could be softened, by tidings of the child’s joy and safety.

Grand’mère heard him in unbroken silence; her gaze never leaving his face, and reading there that she did not suffer alone.

Of his own trial he said nought; he dwelt only on the brightness, on the security, on the eminence of the future that Viva had chosen. What was heartless in her conduct he left unrecorded; what was tender and generous he lingered over. Yet despite himself the story was told in weariness, and had the chill of grief in it, as the snow drifted up

against the lattice-window, and the red flame grew low in its socket.

They knew that never again would the child's form,—that had lent such light and grace to the little homely chamber with its blackened elm wainscots and its white-washed walls, and its pendant strings of thyme, and onions, and pumpkins swaying from the rafters,—come thither to dance upon the bare floor, and mirror itself in the burnished coppers.

The old peasant heard without answering a word; her face did not even change when he spoke of the offer which the Duke, in considerate kindness, had sent for her to make her home near Viva's new resting-place.

'You need feel no sorrow, no separation,' Tricotrín, giving the message, pursued. 'They wish that you should live in all comfort and peace near her. They desire that you should go where she will go, and dwell on the Lirà estates, where you will see her most likely with every succeeding autumn of each year. You—'

She rose and stopped him, and spoke for the first time since her paroxysm of dread and of despair at Paris had broken forth, in eloquent, quivering invective.

'Tricotrín—I am an old woman and poor, and the time for my hand-labour is well-nigh passed. But—if so it be willed that I live on and on through

other desolate years, I will go out, and wash linen in the river, clear insects from the vines, gather fruits for the markets, weed stones from the trefoil, and beetroot, and sainfoin, ere ever I will take bit or drop, log of wood or roof of house, from those who have robbed us of her !’

‘Nay, it is no robbery. They mean aright—’

‘Aright? Can it be aright to build the pile of her glories on the stone of her ingratitude? Can it be aright to bid a young child forget the one debt of her life? Can it be aright to take her into high places, where she shall learn to blush to tell truth of herself? But let that be! I have no wish to say ill of her. She has been as the core of my heart for too long. Only let them know this,—though I shall hunger like one in famine for the sight of her face and the sound of her voice, I will never go nigh those who have led her astray. I have no title to dwell longer under this roof, which was only kept for her sake; but I have strength still, and I will go and lie down with the oxen, and ask the fowls for their corn, before I will take alms at the hands of your spoilers. I have spoken !’

There was resolve, so strong and so proud, on her face, that it rendered almost beautiful the aged, weather-beaten, sun-bronzed features; her eyes kindled, her mouth set, her voice grew clearer; all the bold, hardy, peasant blood in her rose as it had risen when she was offered the government-alms she



flung back, to the rulers who had sent out her firstborn to perish in Africa.

Tricotrin saw and heard; and he bent his head with the reverence he ever gave to the pure honesty of this simple and undaunted nature.

‘Grand’mère! There is no need to think of that. This place is yours so long as you shall will to have it so. You cannot deem so ill of me as to think that—’

‘Tricotrin, you are a generous man; we know that well,’ she answered him, with the anguish and the wrath in her eyes softening away. ‘I have never been two leagues outside my own vine country, and shall not begin my travels now. But neither have I ever lived on alms, nor will I now. Whilst I could serve—*her*, it was just that I should take your bread; but now that I am of no use, how should I justify myself to eat it?’

‘Hush!’ he said, gently, and his voice had an unutterable sweetness in it. ‘Every man owes a debt to his mother; mine died ere I knew her. I can only pay it to her sex. Do not fly from my shelter. Your hearth is the only home that I know. Keep it,—lest ever I wander to it weary and maimed. Keep it,—lest ever the child that you lose should find her visions fade as she pursues them, and learn to long for its refuge and pine for its peace.’

As he spoke, the brave, strong, sunburnt face, on which the light from the fire played, grew paler

and more tender, till all the passion died from it.

‘Tricotrin,—you are a noble heart,’ she said, slowly. ‘You know how to cover your charities with the grace and the goodness of souls that give as God gives the sun and the fruits and the harvest. But think you she will ever come back?—nay, listen. I thought so too when my lads went forth; they flung their glad arms round me, and they kissed me with their honest lips, and they all whispered in my ear “we shall be back so soon!” And the one would come as a great soldier with crosses on his breast; and the other would come as a rich man to wed the little yellow-haired girl at the water-mill, and rear up his young children around me; and Antoine,—my handsome Antoine!—would come as a liberator, as a redeemer, as a chief of the people, to bind France in one vast brotherhood of peace. Well! one was slaughtered in African raids; and one was crushed by a building stone; and one was shot down by his countrymen’s carbines. That is how they “come back” to us—the children of our love!’

She turned away, and employed herself in her homely household cares, heaping the wood upon the flames, scalding some red wine in a copper stoup, brushing the snow down from off his outer garment. The peasant instinct and habit of her life led her to labour as the only palliative of woe.

‘It is an awful night, Tricotrin,’ she said, spreading bread and chestnuts before him. ‘You must have felt the storm bitterly.’

He bent his head in silence. The food and the steaming wine stood untouched beside him. Looking at him earnestly, as in the first hour of her anguish she had been too blinded by her grief to do, she saw that the fairness of his face had lost all colour, and that the sun-hued waves of his hair were whitening with other silver than the silver of the snow.

And her heart hardened against the child, whom she had nurtured and cherished from that early time when the tearful smiling eyes of the forsaken thing had first looked up at her from the ferns and the blue fraxinella. She laid her brown, wrinkled hand gently on his shoulder.

‘Tricotrin,—when my sons went forth, one spoke of duty to his flag, and one spoke of duty to his betrothed, and one spoke of duty to his country; but not one of the three remembered that duty might lie nearer his own hearth; not one of the three remembered that I had endured the pangs of their birth, the woes of their infancy, the fret of their passions, the evils of their maintenance. The children never remember—they live in themselves. But when in turn they grow heart-sick, and are betrayed, and hunger and thirst, desolate amidst the wealth of the world, then they remember us,

and yearn for us—then we are avenged. She forgets you now. In the day of her necessity she will pray for you, and, it may be, pray vainly.’

A shiver, that was not of the cold of the night, shook him as he heard. The deep quivering voice of the speaker had the terror as of prophecy in it.

‘God forbid,’ he answered her, ‘that ever my vengeance should come so!’

‘It would be but justice,’ she muttered. ‘But the only justice we get upon earth breaks our own hearts when it falls.’

And she left him, and went into her own chamber, and wept bitterly, as the aged alone weep, when the light of their eyes has passed from them for evermore, and none other can ever illumine the brief dark space that parts them from the grave.



## CHAPTER X.

‘**W**RITE to me to the care of Mère Rose,’ he had said, when he had parted from her. ‘If thou art happy—keep silence. But when aught pains thee, write.’

To the house in the Pays Latin, where she had once heard the grisette sigh for those who went to the Rome of their desires, her letters flew, for awhile, swiftly as carrier-pigeons. For the heart of the child was at unrest, and full of love, and therefore full of love’s twin-brother, pain.

When the spring deepened to summer, the winged words came more seldom. They were carrier-birds made laggard by the tempting of warm suns and luscious fruits, and by the luring melody of winds and waters.

With the autumn but very few ever came. They were as doves that would not answer to those who

murmured their old familiar names, because they better loved the peace and the abundance of the palm-groves in a new and brighter land.

Through the year that followed they almost ceased ; one, here and there, in a stretch of many months, still coming like the single bird that bore the olive-branch of hope.

Not seldom he would make long pilgrimages from north or south, from east or west, to ask that single question : ' is there any letter, Mère Rose ? '

And when she, leaning from her lattice, would shake her head, with tears in her own comely eyes, he would turn away.

' So best : it is well with her then.'

But the woman would murmur fiercely and sadly, in her throat : ' Nay ! it is ill.'

And he knew that she was right.

With her body, with her beauty, with her youth it was well : but with her soul ?

At length, one day in a fragrant spring time, when all the city blossomed and laughed with flower and song, Mère Rose reached down from her casement, and in her hand lay a letter, like a little, white, tired bird.

He took it with a light in his eyes that was not from the bright noon sun : and when he had read it, and another one that lay within it, he reeled slightly like a man under a blow, and his lips grew white,

and he stood staring blankly up at the bright sun and seeing nought.

‘Is she dead?’ cried the woman, from the lattice above.

He looked up at her with blind eyes, and answered nothing, but went slowly away down the long street, with heavy staggering steps, as of one in whom there is no life left.

The city was filled with buds, and blossoms, and green leaves, and with the singing of students and maidens, and with the joyous laughter of children, and with the fragrance of tossing lilacs, blue and white, that were flung upward by boyish hands in the sunlight of the feast day.

But Mère Rose, leaning at her casement, heard nothing, and saw nothing of these. She was looking down the street after the man in whose hand the letter was hidden like a snake that stings the hand which fed it; and from his form, as he passed away into the shadow cast by a dim old gothic church, her eyes wandered into the chamber of the opposite house. The casement stood open; and in the darkness within stood the coffin of a woman.

It waited for burial until the festal time of the May-day had come and gone.

‘Ah, thou saidst truly, poor little one!’ murmured Mère Rose, gazing into the chamber of death, so quiet and so dark, amidst the light and the song and the blossom of the world around. ‘They come



back from Rome—yes ! But back to those whom they left—never !’

‘Is the child dead, Grand’mère ?’ the people of the vine country asked with bated breath and anxious eyes.

‘Yes—she is dead,’ the old woman answered ever : and would say no more to all the eager, curious, unceasing questions that were put to her by those who met her at the little chapel in the fields, or in the woods where she gathered her fuel ; on the straight road across the plain, as they rode their mules to market, or by the towing path as they walked above their slowly-labouring boats.

‘She is dead,’ was all she answered : and they knew that it was just thus that she had spoken when the story had come from Paris, creeping tardily and terribly through the awe-stricken country in its hot hush of midsummer silence, that her youngest-born had fallen under the bullets with the hymn of liberty on his lips.

‘The child was dead,’ they murmured among themselves : they did not feel much wonder, she had never been one of them, she had never seemed of their mould and of their kind, she had always been invested to their sight with something rare and strange, and not of mortal birth. They had watched her careless, useless, cloudless life, among the sunshine and the flowers, so unlike to their own hard toilsome and unlovely lives, as they might have

watched some paradise bird, had one flown, of a sudden, down amidst the swallows of the hamlets, and the plovers of the fields, with all the colours of the east upon its gorgeous wings.

‘She was dead,’ they repeated amongst themselves; and broidered on the naked barren fact a thousand tales woven at evening with their women’s flax upon the wheel, or passed from mouth to mouth with the stone-picking in the corn-lands, and the insect-seeking amidst the vines.

Louis Sarazin, at the ferry, knew the truth; but Sarazin never spoke of it. He only covered over with a piece of tarpaulin the bench on which she had used to sit in the stern of his old black boat, and let no passenger be seated there. And he would stand very quietly at the door of his cottage, looking wistfully down the stream, hour after hour, if none disturbed him, with the broken oar or the torn sail in his hand, unmended.

‘They all go down that river, see you?’ he would mutter to his dog. ‘But none of them come back, I suppose they never want the old landing-place any more. Is it all smooth water there? are there no shallows and no speats? Do they not have to row against the incoming tide at any time, I wonder? I suppose not, for they never want the old landing-place any more.’

Those who heard him, said that in his great age his brain wandered, that his senses were gone,

that he saw in his silent highway the highroad of human life, and grew mad thereon. Only his dog was wiser; his dog only knew his meaning, and pressed more closely, and licked his withered bony hand in tender consolation.

‘She was dead:’ to all her little native world about the river, on which her glad eyes had opened with so many summer dawns. A few amongst them said prayers for her departed soul, when they kneeled down at the wayside cross from which the thatched roof of the home, that she had shared with the swallows, was visible where it thrust itself through its cover of green leaves. But the greater number took the words as holding but a figurative meaning, and believed that the child of the fairies had gone to that strange land whence she came, and whispered marvellous things of her where they sat by the light of the oak log of Noel, or brought the waggons of grapes to the wine-press in the shade of the autumn-browned boughs.

But away southward, when gossips met in the porch of the dairy-house that looked out over the broad, low-lying, water-threaded pastures about Villiers, a great-limbed, brown-faced, tawny-skinned milk-woman, with her arms akimbo, and a brutal laugh on her mouth, scoffed at her neighbours’ regret and mocked at their idiocy.

‘Dead? Dead? That is what they always say when one of their angels has fallen! Dead! She

is no more dead than we are. She is gone to riches and shame, that I warrant you. Oh ho ! have you forgot the little liar's story of the magic fruit and the sorcerer's ring on the Indian jessamine ? And who was the sorcerer except our young lord ?—and what do his dainty jewels always betoken ? How blind ye are, blind as bats that butt themselves against a barn door, when they are driven out of their nests at noonday ! Dead ! If she be dead, then are my cows dead where they graze yonder. She was bad, I tell you ; bad, core through, like a gourd that has the worm. Did she not call us a set of senseless peasants ? and she a bastard too, a bastard most like of the man that fed her ! Well—I shall know that lily-white face of hers, with its mouth like yon carnation, and its hair like ripened wheat, a score years hence if ever my eyes light on it. Dead ! she is no more dead than that mouse that skirries over the floor. She is only—gone to Paris !'

And she laughed again, cruelly, in the mellow waning evening-time ; for jealousy is lusty of life, and tenacious of it, and is as the toad which can lie stirless under a stone through many seasons, yet keep its sight and its venom, unspent, to use when the stone that has held it down is rolled off it.

Now, which was the truer version, hers, or that gentler belief which mourned the child as innocent and lost, none could tell : for to all questions Grand'mère answered ever, 'she is dead.'

And Tricotrin came no more into the vine-country at the harvest-time.

The pipers piped, and the maidens danced, and the oxen drew their loaded wains crowned with green branches, and the ruddy blossoms of the declining years ; but no more was heard that sweet, wild, rapturous music that had caught in it all the cadences that the fauns of old had danced to in the virgin forests, whilst yet the world and the gods had been young.

And to the people who had loved him, there seemed a silence through the land.



## CHAPTER XI.



IN the wild western seaboard a little hamlet hung upon the rocks like a curlew's storm-swept nest, high in air, and overlooking the wide Biscayan waters.

The great black cliffs were dark as night; the chasms between them were yawning pits, of which no men living told the depth; the land for leagues on leagues inland was a desolate heath, a wilderness of thorny gorze broken only by grey stones of shattered Druid altars.

Life was hard there; a long incessant struggle with all the forces of the earth and elements, a never-ending contest with the winds and waters to snatch the scanty bitter bread of bare subsistence from out the fishes' mouths. In the long, tempestuous, cruel winters, death entered well-nigh every household, and few boats returned with

all those who, at their setting forth, had manned them. The children were early braced to peril, and scourged with the stripes of the sharp sea foam. The aged were old long ere their time, and toiled like mules up and down the steep stairs of rock, laden like mules with driftwood, or with weed flung upward by the storms.

There was a little chapel on one of the highest ridges of the rocks, where a light burned steadfastly all through the blackest nights of hurricane. There were a few huts that formed the village, all huddled together in the hollow of the cliff like callow birds fearful of coming rain. There were men, melancholy, taciturn, rugged, of a hard simplicity, of a dog-like fidelity, like most dwellers of the mountains or by the ocean. There were women with the old iron heroism of amazonian times, whose naked limbs were beaten by the billows, and whose massive arms wrenched drowning bodies from the breakers, till nothing of womanhood remained in their aspect except in the sad and steady gaze of their large brooding eyes.

They were a rough, and sometimes a brutal people. They were often beset with the torment of famine; their pitiless stony shores would yield them little, and in revenge they were, in many seasons, without mercy to those who were cast away upon their rocks. There were men among them who thought little of drawing a knife across the neck of

a wrecked sailor, and robbing the dead of the gold rings in his ears. They were very lonely in their wind-beaten fastnesses, where their only mates were the seagulls and eagles; they grew half savage, as those who live in such isolation will. Hunger bit them sharply at times; and when they were famished they turned on any prey like lions.

There were higher natures amongst them, on which solitude and privation had not this influence, on which the noble sublimity and terrific grandeur of their shores produced only gravity and sadness; but there were others—and these were the larger number—who would fight over a drowned corpse, for sake of the purse belted round its body, like wild beasts over a heap of offal, and who looked on the flotsam and jetsam of the seas as their own right divine, with which no living thing from the doomed ship should be left to dispute their title.

And,—yet darker deeds than these made their wild crest of rock a name of terror to mariners. Sometimes it was utterly in vain that the light of Mary and her Angels gleamed in the high spire of the chapel. Sometimes, on the darkest and dreadest nights of late autumn and midwinter, round a headland where the chapel lantern could not be discerned, high up amongst the blackest and steepest cliffs, a tar blaze would break into the darkness and send forth a flame that could be seen for leagues across the waters. So that any hapless vessel,

labouring in the trough of a heavy sea, beholding the false signal, and by evil fortune mistaking it for that of the Church, came straightway to her ruin, and was dashed keel foremost on the pointed submerged rocks, and impaled upon them; and never again saw the light of daybreak steal over the seas.

Those who lit that beacon of murder were never brought to justice; safe in their caverns and defiles, the assassins crept safely, by subterranean ways, back to their hamlet and amidst their people. It had been safer to thrust a hand into a hornet's nest than to follow and arraign them there. Even their comrades did not rightly know who did the work. It was only when some rarer jewel than common glittered in some fisherman's ear, or some richer-hued scarf was wound about the hips of his mistress, that the rest whispered together, half envious, half abhorrent, that he must be one of those who fired the flame.

In the beginning of one winter, food was very scarce in this sea-den. The fisheries had brought little in; the weather had been calm though dull; there had been no wrecks; and though it was known in the hamlet that the death-beacon had thrice been lighted aloft, it had failed to lead any ship astray. They became fearfully impoverished; famine visited them; and the men were forced to bite the salt twine of their nets in their longing to

devour something, and the children wasted to skeletons, and died, and were thrust hastily away into holes in the sand.

A horrible longing for the signs of the storms came on them. A murderous prayer for the rage of wind and water often rose to their tongues—a prayer reckless and godless.

At this season one of the wreckers, he whose brain and whose hand had first devised this thing, stole up one midnight through the crooked crevice, in the bare stone of the cliff, that served him as a stairway. His torch was in his hand, and his soul was set on murder. There were bitter north winds driving over the ocean; there were grey fogs and starless skies; there was a single ship striving heavily through a churning sea. It was a fair chance, as he muttered to himself.

In his shingle hut, in the village yonder, no fresh food had touched the lips, for months, of a woman whom he loved. The leathery skin of some salted fish had become too great a luxury for them to obtain; she had been driven to chew the broad ribband of the seaweeds, and grind the fishbones into the likeness of flour to make bread: and never made murmur or moan at her privation, but only showed the gnawing of famine by the wolfish glance of her eyes and the drawn lines of her mouth.

There rode the ship,—doomed, surely, to perish, if lured here by the light. The rocks, sharp as needles,

hard as iron, over which the sullen waters floated, would do his work for him unerringly. Refuse, that to him would be treasures, would be swept up on the in-flowing tide. Food, fuel, most likely raiment, possibly gold, would be hurled up on the foam ; human creatures, too, dying or dead, who would, in the mad clinging of men to the riches that they cannot take with them beyond the grave, have bound about them some belt of value or some bag of coin. There would be wherewithal to eat, and to drink, and to be clothed, in his darksome and desolate cabin. What matter a death wail the more on the wind ? What matter the ship sinking an hour soon, or an hour late, to her doom ?

Ere now he had thrust back a shivering, striving frame into the blinding spray, from which it had well-nigh struggled ; ere now he had stunned, with the blow of his club, a girl whose face had risen out of the breakers, with wide-opened eyes of awful appeal in the glare cast upon it from the lightning. He had done such things before, he could do them again, for the sake of an ounce of gold from a finger-ring, of a necklace of beads off a maiden's throat. Gold would buy brandy, the hot, strong, blessed, accursed drink of forgetfulness ; and the necklace would show rarely on the long, stately, brown throat of his bona-roba. And in his fashion—tiger's love for tigress—he loved the woman who starved in his hut on the beach.

So he stole through the tortuous, narrow, cavernous way, winding upward, steep as a ladder, cramped as a coffin, going higher and higher, up and up, into the bowels of the rocks above. And every now and then, where he went creeping like a lizard, with the torch between his teeth, he stopped, and softly blew upon the flame that was dying down in the damp and noxious air of the chasm. It was the spark of life to him.

He felt a latent fear, that never before had touched him, of setting light to his bonfire. There had come one amongst them who had set his face steadfastly against this evil trade; who had sworn that if the false beacon blazed afresh he would unearth the man that fed and fired it, or perish like the ships himself; and these men of the western coast knew that their visitant would keep his word. Therefore the wrecker went with a certain terror at his heart, drawing himself slowly upward, as serpents crawl, through the perpendicular cliff towards his goal that hung a thousand feet and more above the level of the sea.

The fire was ready piled there. It was safe from all discovery. None, save those to whom the secret of those passages through the body of the solid rock was known, could ever attain that height, which rose, a sheer straight wall of stone, up from the shore, and was severed by deep abysses on either side from the adjacent rocks.

He raised himself tediously and painfully up the ascent, in whose narrowed space and fetid air he could scarcely breathe. His hands at last grasped the topmost ledge; he lifted himself gradually on to the highest point, where his beacon was set. The ridge of all the other cliffs, lofty though they were, sank far below him: countless fathoms downward there rolled the grey sullen mass of water. The roar of its waves ascended in a faint hoarse sound, and a dense mist covered all the surface of the sea.

There was no light except the glimmer of the slow match that he bore; no movement save his own, except when a night-bird flew by on the rushing of the north wind. He took sure footsteps on the jagged uneven peak; then set his match to the oil-soaked tow of the torch that he had carried in the grip of his teeth.

The tow caught and flared alight; he lifted his hand to fling the burning flax upon the piled dry touchwood, and the tar barrels of his beacon:—ere he had cast it his arm was seized, the torch was wrenched out of his hand, and thrown flame downward over the cliffs: a man closed with him.

The wrecker was supple and vigorous, sinewy of frame, and skilled in physical exercise, a giant, whose limbs were braced by the strength of the waves, and whose nerves were trained in the daily habit of peril: but he had met his match in his un-

known foe who wrestled with him in the blackness of the night. With the quenched flame of the torch all light had gone ; the sailor struggled by sheer instinct, like a wild beast attacked when it is blinded, and strove to fling his opponent off him and over the rock, into the wailing waves below. The part on which they stood was narrow ; a single overpoise would have thrown them down into the gulf beneath, locked in each other's grasp ; yet neither thought once of letting loose his hold ; both struggled for the mastery.

No word was uttered : it was an even combat of sheer strength, fought on that slender, jutting, slippery ledge, that overhung at such vast height the bottomless pit of the devouring sea.

Thrice the wrecker all but gained ascendancy, and had his arms locked round his opponent's waist, and well-nigh lifted him up from the stone on which they stood, to fling him over the edge to meet his death. Thrice his antagonist resisted him, and kept his feet as though they had been rooted into the rock itself.

It was a darkness in which both were blind :— both knew that with every moment they might be hurled down two thousand feet of air. Yet still,— neither loosened their grip one instant.

The curlews flew round their heads with shrill outcry ; the noise of the sea boomed louder as the spring tide rushed in ; the bitter north wind howled



around the peak:—they strove together for dear life on a shelf of granite scarce wider than a horse's back.

The sailor, maddened and brutalized by rage and fear, at length made frantic effort to get free his arm, and draw the knife at his belt from out its sheath. His foe felt the movement that he could not see. With swift keen science he closed in, nearer still, with the wrecker; twisted his arm backward as men twist a bough to break it; and seizing him round the loins with the true athlete's skill, shook him, swayed him, lifted him, and stretched him prostrate.

The sailor was stunned: his head had struck upon the granite. His antagonist stood awhile breathless, exhausted, with the sound of the winds and waters surging dully on his ear, and the blood in his veins beating like pulses. He could not tell whether he had dealt death or no: till he stooped, and passed his hand over the motionless body, he could not tell whether it had not swayed forward and been dashed into pieces on the rocks below.

The darkness was impenetrable: even the white flash of a roused seagull's wing could not be seen; he could not move a step lest he should out-tread the narrow limits of the ledge on which he stood. There was not even the ray of a single star through the storm-wrack of the clouds.

He had no means of lighting any of the touch-wood that lay near; and if he had possessed any

could not have used his means, lest the light should have lured the vessel to that very destruction which he had risked his own life to avert from her. He had no choice but to rest where he was ; with his back against the pile of the beacon-timbers, and the northern blasts raging around him.

It had been past midnight when the wrecker had gone forth to his errand : he knew that a few hours would bring the dawn.

Therefore he waited, with the man who, for aught he knew, was dead, lying at his feet, and the hungry sea fretting and raging far down beneath, as though in fury because cheated of her prey.

The moments seemed as years, bathed in that gloom, knowing that an unfathomable abyss yawned beneath his feet, with no sound but the thunder of the wind among the cavernous cliffs, with no companion save a creature whom he might have slain, or who, if living, might yet arise and fly at his throat.

As he stayed there, a faint spark dropped from the torch amongst the light pine-boughs that helped to make the beacon, blown by the wind, gathered brilliancy, and increased into a flame.

The bright spot caught his eye ; with cautious movement he leaned and caught the branch that was on fire ; it burned slowly, but gave a dull ruddy glimmer, insufficient to be seen by those at sea, but

enough to throw light on the place immediately around him.

He held it to the wrecker's face : the man's eyes changed and glared, his senses had revived though he had not yet power to move.

'It is you !' he gasped.

'It is I,—move a limb and I will shoot you dead.'

The sailor, lying there half stunned yet, and dazed by the flicker that was held against his sight, stared stupidly at the glitter of the pistol.

'Why did you not use that before ?' he muttered, half conscious, half senseless.

'We should not have been equal : you had no fire-arms.'

The man said nothing : he looked in sullen wonder at the face above him, on which the dim red gleam shone faintly. He was awed ; and filled with a vague superstitious terror. He did not believe the foe that he had dealt with could be mortal.

'Can you rise ?' his conqueror asked him.

He tried to lift himself, obediently : the fall had bruised him, but had broken no limbs. He moved his head with a gesture of assent ; his eyes incessantly fastened on the steel glisten of the weapon that covered him.

'You can stir ;—very well. Then rise up and lead the way down your accursed passages. Attempt

to resist me,—attempt to escape me,—and I will send a bullet through your brain. You know me: you know that I keep my word:—as I kept it to-night.'

The wrecker stared at him with the same stupid amaze; as of one who beheld some being of another world than his own. Then, docilely as a dog, he gathered his aching limbs together, and crept slowly along the ledge, down to the aperture by which he had ascended, and into the hollow space that ran through the substance of the rock.

He dared not disobey; he essayed neither resistance nor evasion; he knew that the pistol was levelled at his head, and that its shot would pierce his brain if he attempted to go astray, or to turn upon his victor.

The pine branch gave light enough to illumine the tortuous crevice as they dragged themselves through it; he could not turn aside because its narrow twisting tubes had no crannies, no outlets, no hiding-places, and he dared not endeavour to outstrip his pursuer, because he knew that his instant death would be the penalty of any attempt at flight. Once, pausing to take breath, he stole a hasty glance backward.

'How did you come there?' he muttered in his clenched teeth.

'I scaled the cliff.'

'You could not! The face of it is as bare as a man's hand.'

‘That may be ; but it is not more bare or more steep than the wall of an Alp.’

‘God ! No living soul ever tried it, but one, and he was dashed to pieces on the shore below.’

‘So I have heard.’

‘You had heard that when you ventured it ?’

‘Yes.’

‘And yet you came ?’

‘To stop you from doing fresh murder. That is words enough. Pass on.’

The wrecker’s breath came hard and fast ; his great frame shook slightly with a tremor as with cold ; he spoke no more, but crept on his downward way, marvelling greatly, and ashamed.

The way was long ; the pine-branch had burned down to its last inch, the grey of the earliest dawn was breaking in the rain-swept stormy skies, when they emerged at length from the subterraneous path, and came out upon the low-lying level shore, on which the high tide of the sea was breaking. The dawn was misty, bitterly cold, ushered in by the wild north winds, that drove the sand along in clouds, and hurled the foam of the waves in their faces.

The sailor turned suddenly on him as they came forth into the open air.

‘How did you tell I went to fire that thing to-night ?’

‘I saw you take a slow match in your hand as

you left your hut : I had often thought you were the criminal.'

The man hung his head ; his eyes still glancing like a cowed wolf's at the weapon that held him to obedience.

'I should not have done it if she had not been starving,' he swore with a blasphemous oath. 'You do not know what famine is !'

The gaze that kept such stern watch over him softened wistfully.

'Do I not ?' he said gently.

Then without more words he went over the league's length of sand and stone that severed them from the fishing hamlet ; driving the wrecker before him as a moor-dog drives a sheep.

'Where would you take me ?' the man muttered, as they drew nigh the rugged stairway cut out of the face of the cliffs which led to the group of cabins.

'To your fellows ;—for judgment.'

'They will not let you touch me !'

'That we shall see.'

With a quick agile movement, before the fisherman could resist, or scarce knew what was done, he had seized his elbows, drawn his arms behind his back, and bound the wrists tight in the knots of a strong rope he had carried :—the man was powerless.

'You do not know me quite well yet, Rioz,' he

said quietly. Rioz, gnashing his teeth in baffled fury, and cursing his own folly in letting himself be netted like a lassoed bull, looked at him with a look that through its sullen passion had something of admiration and of reverence.

‘Know you!’ he muttered. ‘How should one know you? Are you man, or devil, or god?’

‘A little of all, perhaps; like everything else that is human.’

Then with the rope in his left hand, and the pistol in his right, he forced the wrecker up on to the heights on which the cabins of his people hung.

In the early dawn the population—in all some hundred souls, not more—were stirring, though the raw mists of the late autumn night still hung over land and water, wrapping both in its dusky and icy shroud. As they were seen, there was a rush, a shout, a tumult, a shrill outcry, from men’s and women’s and children’s voices; the boats, the nets, the huts, the rude beds of dried weed, were all abandoned as by one single impulse; the little cluster of dwellings broke into agitated life, as a hive of bees breaks into violent movement when its swarm is stirred. A score of men were round them on the instant, naked knives flashing in their hands, yells and curses on their lips, wonder and eagerness and fury in their eyes.

The conqueror of Rioz stood unmoved in the din, holding the wrecker like a chained beast.

‘This man is the assassin,’ he said briefly. ‘If there be any amongst you who would say fair words for a murderer, let him speak them. I will hear.’

The tumult of the blaspheming and threatening voices sank on a sudden as a storm-wind lulls: hardened, brutalized, strong in clannish loyalty, and indifferent of bloodshed as they were, they did not care to take this guilt upon their own heads thus.

The man himself never spoke: he only watched, with intent and thirsty eyes, first the faces of his comrades, then the face of his accuser. There was a dead silence for a moment; then the force of tribe-love and the brotherhood of common habit, common need, common peril, got stronger than their shame; they clamoured in unison for his release. One of their brood should not be bound, not be arraigned, not be chastised; one of their race should not be subject to the laws of other men. They were free; they owned no ruler; they acknowledged no code; one of themselves should not be fettered whilst they had knives to free him. So they shouted, pressing forward in the white sulphurous mist, a throng of reckless, fearless, freeborn animals, who owned no kingdom save the ocean, and no master save the storm-wind. He heard them, in peace; knowing nothing more likely than that their knives would be sheathed in his own breast, but never letting loose his grasp on the bound wrists of his captive.

After awhile the rage of words died down once more into an ominous sullen muttering ; in that instant's pause he spoke.

‘ You have had your speech ; now give me mine. Night after night, for three winters, a lying light has blazed upon your coast to lure good ships to their destruction. You told me you were ignorant of which amongst you was the criminal. I believed you. You are brave men ; and brave men do not lie. A blacker sin, one more treacherous, one more cowardly, never stained a human life. It was a reproach to your seaboard ; a shame on your manhood, that such a guilt was harboured, and allowed to grow, and thrive, and continue, undetected and unavenged, amongst you. You did nought in it—whether from fear, whether from conspiracy, I leave to your own consciences. So the work seemed left to my hand, and I did it. I have watched many nights ; in vain. To-night I seized Rioz, red-handed in the act ; putting his flame to that infernal pile. That his greed might have some miserable spoil—some keg of wine, some bale of wool, some sack of wetted corn, some case of rotting fruit, he was about to light the blaze that would have brought a helpless vessel to her shipwreck, and murdered all the human lives she bore. It has been done many times ere this : more deaths than he could count lie on his soul. For sake of some wretched pillage to sate his hunger, or his wine lust, for sake of some

glimmer of gold to satisfy the miser's avarice within him, he has doomed men and women and children to death under your waves. You can be brutal enough; you can have scant pity for the fleeting life; you can strip the gold off a woman's throat ere yet her corpse is cold; but if you sanction such murders as these, you are fiends and not men. By this crime you are all disgraced. It is not enough that you may not have set your own match to the wood, thrown your own beam to the pile. That this thing has been done, and been pardoned, and been protected amongst you, is sufficient to brand you all with its infamy. The blood-thirst of Ríoz must run in your veins, though his arm alone had nerve to raise the torch and awake the fire. There are noble souls amongst you; are they all dead or sleeping, that this disgrace raises no wrath? that this murderer has lived with his sin unvisited in your midst?'

They were silent, touched with remorse, and burnt with shame; knowing that this sin had been harboured amongst them, half in sympathy, half in desperation; knowing that they had been willing that it should be sheltered in secrecy; knowing that there were others in their community who had shared its guilt and shared its spoils. They dared not claim the murderer again from the hands of his accuser: they dared not either denounce the blood-guiltiness from which their own souls were not pure. They

hung together, stilled, enraged, ashamed, uncertain—Rioz looked at them, and laughed.

‘Ye are bold comrades at need! Well—I say nought. It was an evil deed: but I am willing to bear its brunt. It was my thought and my act; it was only the plunder ye shared! Kill me,—and ye shall, in justice, kill also every man that ever drank of my wine or borrowed my gold. There! will not that thin your numbers?’

The accusation and the irony, bearing the sting of truth in them, inflamed against him every creature of the throng, which a moment before had been clamorous to recover him from chastisement. They rushed at him to strike their knives at his half-bare body; they cried aloud for him to be given to them; they hooted him, and reviled him, and demanded that he should be theirs, that they might cast him down from the peak where his bonfire had blazed!

His captor beat them off, and flung them back; and smiled where he stood at bay.

‘Rioz! I brought you for their judgment. You believed that they would not let a hair of your head be injured: see now what the fellowship of guilt is worth! Will you have my judgment or theirs?’

The wrecker ground his strong white teeth, and faced the brethren on whose loyalty he had counted.

‘Ye curs! ye were willing enough to take a stoup of my rich red drinks for yourselves, and a roll of my bright silks for your light-o’-loves; ye were



willing enough to have barrels of rice and tubs of salted meat rolled from the caves to your cabins, in the hard days of your hunger; ye were willing enough to have all that the beacon brought, and ye fed it, and fanned it, and called it a devil that was better than a god, many and many a time. And now ye are gone against me: now ye are clamouring for my body, that ye may fling it down on the rocks! Ye sharks! there is but one man on this shore this dawn. It is this man who has brought me rope-bound like a netted calf. Look you—he scaled that cliff that has no footing for a goat, just to stand between me and that ship; he perilled his life fifty times because he had sworn that my bonfire should never redden the skies again; he could have shot me and flung me into the sea, and he never used his pistol because I had no arms of that like about me. That was what he did—Tricotrin. And I say that I give my life to him; and I will be judged by him and not by you—ye spawn of the devil-fish that will suck the dead men's bones, but will cry out that ye never took life! He may throw me off the rock, if he will: but ye—come one inch nearer to me, and bound though I be, I will find a means to brain the best amongst ye!’

They were men as bold as he, and of like passions; but for once they hung back in silence, and for once their knives were never lifted: conscience made cowards of them.

‘Tricotrin,’ they muttered. ‘You have taken him, you must deal with him as you will.’

Tricotrin looked at them awhile, and answered them nothing : then he turned to the wrecker.

‘Follow me, Rioz.’

The fisherman followed him without a word ; he went down the side of the cliff and on to the flat yellow shore. The day had now broken, with a faint red flush changing the grey of the sky : in the tender shadowy light a single ship was gliding. The wild winds of the night had sunk to silence ; the sea though heavy still rolled quietly ; the vessel moved unharmed over its waters.

He looked at it, then looked at Rioz : the wrecker turned away with a shudder.

He was not altogether vile ; though he had steeped his soul in murder he had not burnt out his conscience : if the woman he had loved had not hungered he would not have sinned.

His captor let him stand there awhile, with his hands bound in the knotted cords, and his head sunk on his breast, and his eyes afraid to look upon that innocent thing, afar there on the waters, which, had his guilt had its way, would now have been a shattered, shapeless, sinking mass, with the billows breaking over the place of its nameless grave.

Then he spoke.

‘Rioz—you are content to abide by my judgment?’

The wrecker gave a motion of assent.

‘ You heard what your comrades’ sentence would have been. They were willing to shelter your sin while it was safe in secrecy ; but when it had been dragged to the light of day they would have cast your body from the rocks. That is ever the fellowship of sin ; a parasite when the sin is successful, a traitor when the sin is discovered. If they had been just men, and stainless, their sentence on you had not been too severe : you have doomed others to perish, you could not deem it unjust if you suffered by the same death as your victims. If there had been no guilt among them there had been no marvel if they had cast you forth from them, and slain you, in loathing and in vengeance. But they have not the right to deal thus with you : their own hands are not unsoiled, their own souls are not pure. You have said that you would not rebel if I bade you leap from your beacon-point into the sea ; that is to speak idly : you know I am not a murderer : but will you obey as passively if I send you to your rightful due—the galleys ? ’

The wrecker made no answer. He did not lift his head from his breast ; but under his dusky, weather-beaten skin, the blood came and went in rapid flush and pallor, and his teeth were set like a mastiff’s.

‘ So long as the galleys are the means whereby your country visits a criminal for his acts, you can-

not claim exemption from them,' pursued the grave, gentle accents of his judge. 'For less than you have done, men have forfeited their lives upon the scaffold. If for one murder done, in rash passion or jealous wrath, the murderer perish, how shall you escape? You who cannot number the creatures that through you may have been stifled in those waters! you who have doomed the young with the old, the innocent with the guilty, to perish by a hideous death for this sake only:—that your hearth might have fuel, that your trencher might have bread! If your hand have never thrust any struggling body back into the waves,—if your steel have never ended the throes of some quivering wretch,—none the less have you blood-guiltiness upon your soul; unredeemed even by such motive as the tyrannicide or the fanatic may plead for his crime. If I deliver you up to the tribunal; if I take you to the sentence of the galleys; if for all the rest of the years you shall live you shall toil in chains, eat and drink the bread and water of bitterness, be branded to every eye that looks on you, labour like the mill-horse under the threat of the whip, live in a hell of foul utterance and evil passion, never again see the leaping gladness of the ocean, never again breast the winds and the waves in all the exultation of your strength, never again look into the eyes or kiss the mouth of a woman you love,—tell me, will my judgment be more than justice?'

A great shudder shook the mighty limbs of the fettered man.

He was silent many moments. Then at length he answered--the truth, sullen yet resolute.

‘No. It will be just.’

Tricotrin looked at him long and earnestly.

‘Brute and fiend though you are, you have greatness in you,’ he muttered. ‘For you have courage, and you have truth.’

The wrecker did not hear; his eyes were fastened on the receding ship sailing through the soft, young light; his thoughts were fastened on the dull, drear, endless years that waited for him in the galley-slave’s doom.

Tricotrin waited awhile, letting this thought fasten on and penetrate the long-brutalized conscience of the man with whom he dealt.

‘If you had gone back from your word, and disputed the fairness of that doom, I should have abandoned you to it as a worthless and hopeless ruffian,’ he said, curtly. ‘But you are brave enough, true enough, to confess its justice. There must be some core of honesty in you yet. If the guillotine came down on your neck, you would have no more than justice still. But—I believe that there is that in you which may be worth the saving. The galleys will not save you; they will only cage you in, as a wild beast is caged, and deprive you of the power to do evil. It is a hard question,—how to disarm

and punish crime; made so hard by such as you, that we cannot wonder that the world's wisdom utterly fails at solving it. The galleys will withhold you from doing added crime; but that will be all. They will make a sullen, venomous, half-mad, blasphemous outcast of you, with all the will to do tenfold worse than you have done, and only held back from action by the irons on your ankles and the scourge on your back. If I see you a score years hence, I shall see in you a man whose last state is a million times darker than his first. You will be a tiger, whose claws are cut indeed, but whose lusts to kill are fiercer than ever. They will paralyze your limbs, but they will only inflame your passions. Well—if you have had no care for the better powers that are in you, why should your rulers have care? If you have chosen to strangle the higher life in you, why should they heed aught save your animal instinct to slay that it is their office to stifle and prevent? You will be treated like a caged wild-beast. Well—why not? since you have far viler savageness in you than the poor beasts who never slaughter their kind?’

Rioz heard—with dogged patience.

‘I do not resist,’ he said, slowly. ‘It is right, I dare say. And I said that you should do as you would.’

Tricotrin's eyes filled with a great pity.

‘Do as I would? Well, then hear what it is I

would do. It is this : I would save you from yourself. The galleys would save others from you ; but I would go further than that if I can. What lives you may have wrecked you alone can tell ; I know only that your false beacon has flamed many times, and would have brought yon ship to her death-throe to-night. Therefore I know you—a murderer ; in full intent, if not in actual deed. There can be no plea, no palliation, for the vileness of your guilt. Viler, I think, there cannot be upon earth. But even for your deeds, there can be atonement ; even for your offences, there can be expiation. One life saved by you from those waters will be better amend for your crime than twenty years spent at the galleys. The galleys would simply waste your life, and render it powerless for evil. I would employ your life, and render it powerful for good. There is truth in you, and courage. They must be fit for other things than murder and pillage. Therefore—I will not drive you out to the doom that by law would await you. I will sentence you otherwise ; if you have the force in you I think, you will bear it ; if not, you must carry the galley-chain. You will live alone on that rock where your fire has blazed ; you will hold no communion with your fellows ; you will subsist as you may on the bare food you can glean from the shore and the sea ; you are a strong swimmer, a bold sailor, you will do your uttermost to succour and to save all life that comes in peril off

your headland. I give you—solitude, hardship, travail, atonement. Being of a brave temper, you will not flinch from the working out of your doom. Go,—you are free.’

And he severed the cords that bound the wreck-er’s strong wrists together.

Rioz had lifted his head, and looked him hard in the eyes, as his condemnation was uttered. As the rope fell from his arms and left him at liberty, a great change passed over his face ; its savage gloom passed away, its wolfish glance softened and lightened.

‘You trust me?’ he muttered. ‘You shall see then,—I will do your bidding. It is bitter; yet it is just. I may go mad on that rock; it is like enough. Loneliness kills men’s brain, they say. But while I have sense I will be true to you. And you are merciful too,—you leave me the sea, and the wind, and the air.’

His voice died in his throat; he turned away to go out to his doom.

But the man who had judged him followed him, and laid his hand on his shoulder gently, yet with firm and tenacious touch.

‘Nay—I give you not utter solitude. That were to be more brutal than the galleys. Nor will I leave you to work out my sentence unaided. We will dwell on that rock together.’

Rioz stared blankly at him, with glazed, burning eyes wide open.

‘You!—you! *You* have done no evil? Why should you care whether I drown, or rot, or go mad? Why should you suffer to save me?’

Tricotrín smiled; the smile was weary and more sad than tears.

‘Chut! When you have famine, you cure it in one fashion; when I have famine, I cure it in another. There are two treasures we may both find on that bleak, wind-beaten headland—yours expiation, and mine peace.’

And for three long years he dwelt there—sole companion of an assassin. There were many lives that he saved from the pitiless waters; but there was one life that he saved from a deeper abyss than the lowest depths of the ocean.

It was thus that he dealt with the sorrow within him. It was thus that he wrenched the iron from out his own soul, by wringing the blackness of guilt from the soul of another.



## CHAPTER XII.

**I**N midwinter all Paris was dancing.

Paris dances as nothing else can under the sun or the stars. Did she not dance when her stones ran blood; dance when dynasties fell at her word; dance on the icy glacis of Bréda; dance while the steel cut down through her loftiest throats; dance when the bastard son of Louis Quinze drowned with the roll of his drums the dying words of Louis Seize? Paris dances ever: beautiful, terrible thing, half child, half wanton, twin angel and assassinatress that she is; dances on under the million lights of her winter-nights as under the glorious suns of her summer-eves, under the fetters of tyrannies as under the banners of freedom.

They danced in the palaces, they danced in the mansions, they danced in every hall, and coffee-room, and concert-place, and singing-booth, and

covered garden, in this winter-time. In every spot feet flew, like autumn leaves blown by wild breezes; and laughter echoed like the chimes of sleigh-bells; and men and women went mad with the joyous delirium of motion. Specially they danced, in an abandonment of revelry, in the great hall of the Elysée Montmartre; grisettes and students, and fruit-girls and working men, and all that was maddest and brightest of the labour-world and the student-world of Paris. They lost all sense save that one sense of the hot, intoxicated delight of boundless, leaping, whirling, spinning, unceasing motion; like the whirlwind in its speed, like brandy in its strength, like tigers' frolic in its play. They danced as not even in Paris that night did any dance elsewhere. For above the noise of the hired bands, which, indeed, did sink hushed and abashed in rivalry by it, was the music that Paris loved best, the music that had in its marvellous melody all the colour of a Titian, all the glow of strong wine, all the rush of a swift-running river, all the revelry of a royal carousal. One played for them who would not play at the bidding of monarchs; but who cast out, to those who had not gold to purchase pleasure, the lavish treasures of his genius.

That music could do with them as it would; and now it bade them dance on through the long winter's night, and forget that cold, and pain, and hunger, and toil, and envy, were their daily portions in the

world that was white with its new year's virginal snows.

The player laughed oftentimes as he played, with rich gay laughter; but oftener still there came the look in his eyes as of the dreamy deep meditation, the awed surprise and yet serenity of one who beholds visions that none around him see. His face was the face of a poet, and it had but more fire, more force, more beauty for the silver-white waves of the abundant hair, dashed back like a lion's mane. Hour after hour the music pealed out, untiring, exhaustless; music for which kings would have rained down their wealth, for which these dancers of the populace could only give their love. But this one gift they gave in lavish measure; and when at length the melodies ceased, the vast crowd, pausing, shouted as with one throat such a cheer! as years before had rung out for the great and beloved tribune of the people, when Gabriel Mirabeau had passed amongst them.

Such welcome, the cannon of royal entries, the troops of Imperial guard, the magnetized fear of a subject nation, cannot give, though trumpets call, and drums roll, and artillery thunder, from dawn till sunset.

He could have led them where he would—these bright, wild, tender, ferocious children of Paris, so idolatrous in worship, so merciless in hate. He could have led them where he would, to hurl

down the gates of palaces, to dash aside the serried ranks of guards, to scatter princes as chaff before the winds, to steep new-born liberties in a fell baptism of blood.

They tossed flowers high in the air; they flung up their arms in the bright light; they thronged about him with passionate eagerness, the breasts of the women heaved like waves under a storm, the brows of the men burned red with the fires of freedom struck alight by his art in their souls. He looked down on their upturned faces and on their breathless, tumultuous homage; and smiled;—the smile whose meaning lay far beyond them.

‘My children! No gratitude between *us*. Is there not love?’

Tricotrin—bohemian and wanderer, nameless and homeless amongst men—had a kingdom greater than monarchs held, a power greater than the sceptre can command.

Through the bitter brilliant wintry night he walked, later on, straightly and swiftly, with the free long step of a forest animal, along the chill snow-covered streets of Paris. As he went he sang in a voice that rang through the stillness, and made the sullen frozen patrol listen with a smile on his face, that joyous, drinking, and amorous carol:—  
‘*Sur deux lèvres roses.*’

'I unlearn all my Latin  
On two red lips of satin,  
And study night and morning,  
All other science scorning,  
The art of those twin roses !

High in air the sky-lark sings,  
As to me a maiden brings  
Fruit ripe as her breast is white,  
And wine that is full of light,  
And red as her cheek's roses !

No chair of state can lure me,  
No classic bribe insure me,  
But all the lore of ages  
I glean from those sweet pages,  
Of Love's own leaves of roses !'

The snow was falling heavily ; and was deep upon the earth : he went through it, and over it, with a step firm as a soldier's, light and free as a gypsy's. An old man dragging himself wearily and painfully along, shivering, glanced wistfully at his lighted meerschaum. He stopped, pulled a knot of tobacco and a pipe from his pocket, filled the bowl and lit it ; then gave it to the aged creature.

'Smoke and forget, my friend ! The pipe is our best comrade after death !'—then he went on chaunting his rose-song.

A little child lay curled on a door-step, blue, numb, almost frozen, quite heart-broken, sobbing himself into a fatal slumber. Tricotrin paused again,

lifted up the boy, and shook him from his trance : in the little weary whitened face there were exceeding innocence and grief.

‘Have you no home?’

‘No.’

‘No mother?’

‘No.’

‘How old are you?’

‘Six, I think.’

‘And all alone?’

‘All alone.’

‘Not of Paris?’

‘No. My father came from the west—very far away,—to get work; and there was none: they are ceasing to build, they say. So we starved; and my father killed himself. He is in that terrible black house by the river—’

‘And has left you and Paris a legacy to one another? Scarcely fair; since without him you would have remained in the peaceful regions of the Unarrived: and disembodied souls neither want bread nor get blue with cold. Well! you see that passage, and the door under the third lamp? Run quick there; ask for the woman of the house. Tell her that Tricotrin has sent you: that you are to sleep on his bed, be warmed at his fire, have some milk and some bread, and forget yourself in dream-land till the morning. Then—well then we will see what substitute we can discover for this unpolite

father of yours, who sent you into this best of all possible worlds and never had the decent complaisance to secure you a crust in it. Off, little one—quick !’

The child stared up at him through the falling snow with wide-opened wondering eyes, thinking of the figures of the angels Gabriel and Michael that he had seen in churches, and marvelling which of the twain this was that now had mercy on him in this bleak and brutal night. Then,—remembering him of the milk and bread of which this grand and pitiful angel had spoken, and moved by his little famished desolate heart,—he looked up once swiftly, half afraid, then threw his arms about his benefactor’s knees and covered his feet with kisses. Tricotrin shook him softly away.

‘Chut ! I am no god—only a stray thing like yourself. Go quick ! you want the bread and milk, and the wood fire.’

The child ran, with fresh life put in his chilled, starved limbs : Tricotrin went on, singing his drinking song.

A little way farther down the street there sat a small, brown, shaggy, shivering dog, of no value, of no beauty, shaking all over with the cold and howling piteously. He paused once more, and stroked it, and talked awhile to it, and its grief fell into a lower key, and became a plaintive sighing sound. Its bones were almost through its skin, its eyes were bleared and blind, its misery was great.

‘Get out, you moaning brute!’ cried a woman from a garret-lattice above, as she thrust her head into the darkness and aimed at the little dog a heavy billet of wood.

Tricotrin caught the wood as it came, and saved the cur the blow.

‘Friend,’ he said, quietly glancing up, ‘if you had sent the famished thing a piece of a loaf, it had been softer to his stomach and to my hand!’

The woman peeped at him by the faint gas gleam.

‘Is it you, Tricotrin?’ she said, half-sullenly, half-ashamed. ‘I would not grudge the mongrel a bone; but it is such a wretched beast to howl. Look you: it belonged to a young man that lived here; a fool who was for ever scribbling over every scrap of paper he could find, and thinking he was born to be a poet—God’s mercy! Well—he could not buy a leek for his soup at last, and he had no shirts but the one he had on, and he could do nothing but scribble, scribble, scribble. So the other day we had to break his door open, and we found him stark and stiff on the mattress,—there was a charcoal pan just burned out, and all his poems were a little heap of rent paper. Now that cur you see there belonged to him: and drive it away how we will, it always comes back, and sits under his window, and howls like that. Who is to bear such a noise? It will not go away. And who is to feed it, a thing

worth nothing? I will have it flung in the river, or sell it to a student to cut up with his dissecting knife.'

Tricotrin took the little animal up in his arms, and stroked afresh the matted broken hair.

'Fidelity pays thee ill, poor little wretch?' he murmured. 'Ah! thou art not alone!'

'You have none of that dead lad's writings?' he asked aloud.

'Not I,' the woman answered from above. 'He had torn them to bits, I tell you. There was one roll indeed, one on which he had writ that he had not had the courage to destroy it—he believed it would make his name live, though his body had been killed by hunger. But I burnt it in my stove as soon as I could: how could I tell it was not what would get me into trouble with the police?'

She shut her lattice sharply, unwilling to squander more time and more words on such poor things as a mongrel dog and a dead poet. Tricotrin again went on his way with the little shivering beast in the folds of his loose fur coat. It had ceased to moan, and was trying to lick his hand.

'So!' he murmured, half-aloud. 'The creature that thrusts the boy-poet's trust into her stove for fuel is called the immortal being, and you, who have a tenderer memory and a loyaler love than one woman in ten thousand, get kicked aside as a cur! How enormous is the vanity of humanity! The river or

the dissecting knife—that is the only choice they give you. Little fool! you elected to love a man who had only intelligence, no gold; you elected to serve a life that had only high hopes, no practical pelf; you fastened your heart on a creature who knew the world so little that he fancied the legacy of a dream would be treasured like the legacy of a fortune: few women are so unwise as you were, my dog. And now, because you are a mongrel you are beaten; because you are faithful you are cursed; because you are only a thin, rough, ugly, hapless morsel, with a noble heart beating in your little hairy breast, and an immeasurable love consuming you, you are to be flung into the water with a stone round your neck, or quiver, and thrill, and gasp in torture, under the brutality men call Science! What magnificent justice we have! What appreciation of fidelity! Well—you shall come and have a share with Mistigri: and by-and-by, when the chill of the winter has passed, you shall go into the green country places, and live on a Normandy farm that I know of, and blink your eyes all day in the sun, and roll in the long sweet grass, and sleep under the apple-tree boughs. If your master was really a poet, it must have been an added pain to him to think that he left you alone. Had he the divine afflatus, really, in him? Surely not, or he had never left a little desolate thing like you to starve and to pine in the streets. And yet—I do not know—poets are but

men, men a little nearer to God and the Truth than are others ; and when hunger is keen, and the world is cruel, the truth gets obscured to their sight, and they say that God is dead also—since he will not hear or give answer !’

The little dog nestled closer, comforted ; and Tricotrin passed on through the network of the streets.

Ere long he drew near one which, in the late night, was still partially filled with vehicles and with foot-passengers, hurrying through the now fast-falling snow, and over the slippery icy pavements. In one spot a crowd had gathered ; of artisans, women, soldiers, and idlers, under the light of a gas-lamp. In the midst of the throng some gendarmes had seized a young girl, accused by one of the bystanders of having stolen a broad silver piece from his pocket.

She offered no resistance ; she stood like a stricken thing, speechless and motionless, as the men roughly laid hands on her.

Tricotrin crossed over the road, and with difficulty made his way into the throng of blouses and looked at her. Degraded she was ; but scarcely above a child’s years ; and her features had a look as if innocence were in some sort still there, and sin still loathed in her soul. As he drew near he heard her mutter,

‘Mother, mother! She will die of hunger!—it was for her, only for her!’

He stooped in the snow, and letting fall, unperceived, a five-franc piece, picked it up again.

‘Here is some silver,’ he said, turning to the infuriated owner, a lemonade seller, who could ill afford to lose it now that it was winter, and people were too cold for lemonade, and who seized it with rapturous delight.

‘That is it, monsieur, that is it. Holy Jesus, how can I thank you? Ah, if I had arrested the poor creature—and all in error! I should never have forgiven myself! My silver piece was in the snow!’

The gendarmes reluctantly let quit their prey: they muttered, they hesitated, they gripped her arms tighter, and murmured of the prison-cell.

‘Let her go,’ said Tricotrin, quietly: and in a little while they did so,—the girl stood bareheaded and motionless in the snow, like a frost-bound creature.

Soon the crowd dispersed: nothing can be still long in Paris, and since there had been no theft there was no interest: they were soon left almost alone, none were within hearing.

Then he stooped to her: she had never taken off him the wild, senseless, incredulous gaze of her great eyes.

‘Were you guilty?’ he asked her.

She caught his hands, she tried to bless him and to thank him, and broke down in hysterical sobs.

‘I took it—yes! What would you have? I took it for my mother. She is old and blind, and without food. It is for her that I came on the streets: but she does not know, it would kill her to know; she thinks my money honest; and she is so proud and glad with it! That was the first thing I *stole*! Oh God! are you an angel? If they had put me in the prison my mother would have starved!’

He looked on her gently, and with a pity that fell upon her heart like balm.

‘I saw it was your first theft. Hardened robbers do not wear your stricken face,’ he said softly, as he slipped two coins into her hand. ‘Ah, child! let your mother die rather than allow her to eat the bread of your dishonour: which choice between the twain do you not think a mother would make? And know your trade she must, soon or late. Sin no more, were it only for that love you bear her.’

Then he passed from her swiftly, chanting still the burden of the roses.

The girl-criminal stood mute and paralyzed; her hand mechanically closing on the gold; her dark heavy eyes gazed over the white stretches of the snow, and up at the black star-studded skies: hot tears rushed under her swollen lids, and she flung

up her arms to the heavens with a sob that was prayer and oath in one.

He had ransomed her from more than the prison cell : he had bought her soul from sin.

And the joyous amorous song rang gaily through the night ; for these were daily things that he did, and were nothing new in his life, which if, like the life of Desaugiers, it was one perpetual fête, was also one continual benediction. Turn by turn, his life had been full of mirth, and passion, and poetry, and revelry, and pain, and all the delights of the senses and the soul in changeful sequence ; but in it one thing reigned ever, never sleeping, never shadowed, never silent, never cold, a thing of which men have little, and saints have less,—charity.

By-and-by, through the streets of the old city and across the river he came to where the great front of the Tuileries glittered all alive with light.

‘ Ah ! I remember they are dancing here too,’ he murmured, as he glanced at the illumined palace. ‘ So there is the eldest son of the church spending half a million to entertain the princes of the earth, while out in the street yonder filial piety must turn harlot to get a crust ! Sublime crown of civilization !

And he walked through the Carousel to the Court of Honour.

‘ No one passes,’ said one of the Cent Gardes, bringing his bayonet level, while his sky-blue and silver harness glittered in the gaslight.

‘Bah! I pass; you know me, Petit Jean.’

The guard looked, smiled, and let him enter. He knew that Tricotrin was privileged, by right of that love which the people openly bore him, and the fear which their rulers secretly felt of him.

He stood in the entrance among the fretting horses, shouting lackeys, flaring torches: they filled the vast court with movement and with colour, whilst above-head the heavy snow whitened the roofs of palace, pavilion, and gallery.

The guests of the court were then leaving in the grey of night that met morning: hundreds passed by him, women of beauty and birth, and men of every nation’s nobility, the brilliant throng of a new-year ball passing out to their equipages in the red tossing flame-light of ten thousand torches.

Among them came one whose loveliness had no peer even amongst all that was loveliest in Europe:—a woman of a perfect beauty, moving with slow sweeping step; a woman of lofty slender stature like a palm; of voluptuous and exquisite grace; with eyes dark as night, full of languor and lustre, and a skin like the snow, and hair of lightest gold, in which stars of diamonds shone; a woman with the dignity of an empress, the glance of a sorceress, the face of an angel.

And the running footmen, with their torches blazing, cleared a wide way before her, and called

aloud for the carriage of,—‘*Madame la Duchesse de Lirà.*’

He, standing there beyond the torch glare, started and went forward, the blood flushing his forehead, his eyes lighting to eager passion.

Once this beautiful sovereign had said, ‘If I forget you then may God forget me;’—now her careless imperial glance sweeping over the throng passed over him and did not even see him.

His head dropped as if he had been struck a sharp blow; a keen anguish, like the anguish in the bold faithful eyes of a hound wounded by the hand that it loves, came into his: not without need and prescience had he once answered her,—‘thy sins to me I shall forgive thee: for what else have I given thee, love?’

The carriage rolled away with noise and royal ceremony; bearing her from the scene of her victories; and he went slowly forth back over the river into the haunts of the old city with the stray dog in his bosom.

With the riches of his genius had he made the hearts of the poor and heavy-laden to rejoice that night in innocent and natural delight: with the stripes of human ingratitude and oblivion was he scourged that night himself.

‘What matter? what matter?’ he murmured, as he went through the driving sheets of snow. ‘What matter?—she is happy.’



### CHAPTER XIII.



IN the little kitchen of the river-house in the vine-countries an old old woman sat beside her fire.

Her home had everything that her hardy habits stood in need of; there was abundance of wood in the log closet, there was abundance of brown sweet loaves in the bread pot, there was ample winter provision in the red earthen pans and the shining brass dishes; there was a bright and pleasant comfort in the fire-glow, in the scent of the herbs, in the purr of the cat; and a sturdy bright-visaged peasant girl of sixteen, a grand-niece of her own from a distant province, never left her day or night. Yet in the worn, brave, patient, sunburnt face, so old, so still, so dark, there was an abiding, unutterable grief,—a grief that never spoke.

In the long summer days she would creep out slow-

ly into the porch, under the great flowering boughs of the chestnuts, and stand for hours shading her eyes with her hand, and looking out to where the distant road ran through the vine-fields,—the road that led to the great world.

In the long winter nights she would move towards the window, and draw aside its little red curtain, and sit for hours looking out to where the swollen river roared between its banks,—the river that swept westward to the sea.

Summer and winter she watched for that which never came :—the earth holds no greater agony.

At times she would go up the stairway to a great heavy walnut-press full of curious doors and dim recesses, and unlock these, and draw them forth, and gaze at their contents ;—linen and woollen stuffs, and furs, and many different heaps of gold : she never touched them, but she would gaze at them very long. And at other times she would sit under the chestnuts, or over the warm hearth, as the seasons of the year went by, with only that mute and hopeless pain upon her face, saying nothing, but only stroking the white head of the great cat, *Bebée*.

She knit, and spun, and eat, and drank, and sliced the onions, and washed the lettuces, and dried the thyme, and worked on, and served herself with industrious travail, as all the temper and the teachings of her life had made her do, whilst there was one lingering pulse of strength in her aged limbs.


But she scarcely ever spoke ; and the look in her eyes never changed.

It was only when she sank to sleep in the warmth of the sun, or the heat of the fire, that in her dreams words stole brokenly through the lips, whose sternness relaxed, and whose silence was broken. And the little Lorraine peasant maiden, bending over her with pity and with wonder, found those dream-murmured words to be ever the same :

‘ They never come back ! They never come back ! ’



#### CHAPTER XIV.

‘ HAVE not sold one!’ said a little Italian lad, with his soft brown eyes brimming over with tears: he was a half-starved delicate child of some ten or twelve years, with a tray of white images.

He was one out of the many thousands, bartered for a few coins, from their homes on the slopes of the Abruzzi or Apennines. A miserable home, sheds shared with the goat and the ass, with dried forest-leaves for a bed, and a piece of sheep-skin for a garment, and a draught of sour milk for a meal: but which yet looked so happy and so fair,—with its sweet-smelling mountain air, and its long summer days, with the herds at pasture, and its play at eventime under the broad cork tree, and its deep still hush of solitude, with the spring-loosened snows stealing down through the silence,

—when the child had been torn from them all for ever, and carried northward and westward, to suffer the anguish of cities, the desolation of the streets, the famine of home-sickness amidst alien crowds.

He had not sold one : standing there all the day through in the gay, changing, thoughtless throngs of Paris. And he knew that if he went back to his taskmaster without a coin for all his wasted day, the blows would rain down on him like hail, and he would be flung into the noisome pestilential darkness of the cellar that he lived in, without even the mouldy crust of bread that was by right his supper. Worse things even than this were done to him,—a young child in a strange land, with the seeds of mortal disease in him, sure to die and tell no tale :—and he wept bitterly in the spring-tide sunshine that quivered through a million leaves in a million threads of glory on his head.

He had sold nothing, eaten nothing, not drunk even a drop of water since the sweet balmy April day had commenced ; and on an organ near they had played an old Lombardic tune that his mother had used to sing to him in the little cabin under the rock, while the evening mists grew white and hid the valley below. And the air had made the tears start in his eyes, and the great sobs rise in his chest :—that time seemed so long—ah, God !—so long ago ! For a childhood that is unhappy, is as a martyrdom without end.

‘I have not sold one!’ he cried to the only living creature who that day paused beside him, to ask why a little, pale, thin, wretched, child was in sorrow in a foreign city.

‘Ah! You grieve because the world will have none of your toys?’ cried his questioner. ‘Well,—that is the grievance of all of us. The woman will not have our love,—the public will not have our science,—the galleries will not hold our art,—the nation will not accept our policies,—one way or another everybody chafes because every one else will not take to his playthings. And the successful man is the man who knows how to turn his toys to the tastes of the moment.’

The boy looked up, shrinking from the jest that seemed to him so untimely and so unmerciful; but as he met the eyes bent on him he took hope from their sunny compassion. There was no pity in the words, but there was infinite pity in the look; and children and dogs regard the glance far more than the speech.

‘I have sold nothing!’ he repeated. ‘And you do not know what the Patron is when one goes back without money!’

‘He beats you—eh?’

‘Ah!’—the child gave a great shudder, a shudder of remembrance and of foreboding intermingled.

‘Of course he does. He sees the world thrash

all who have not the knack of getting gold in it. He only follows the fashion. He would not beat you if you stole?—to be sure not; he follows the fashion there too. But you do not steal?’

‘No! I am afraid.’

‘Well,—not a noble motive for abstinence, but a wholesome one in the absence of a sturdier. Retain it. And you have not taken a penny all this day through?’

‘Not one!’ sobbed the child, in a loud wail of terrified misery. ‘Not one! and he will thrash me till I cannot stand.’

‘Most men are in your predicament, save a few happy hawkers who know well how to trim their wares, and a few wise men like myself, who, having nothing to buy or to sell, contrive to live at our ease. Well—if I had the money to purchase your trayful you should have it; since I have not, let me see if I can get rid of some of that trumpery for you.’

Before the astonished and sobbing child had recovered his amaze at an address that rung on his ear as so wantonly cruel, his companion had caught up the board full of white images, sprang on a bench under one of the linden-trees of the boulevard, and raised thus above the passing populace, arrested its attention by his attitude and his challenge.

‘Stop! all you who are useless drones in the city!’ he cried aloud. ‘The industrious men may be off,—they will not diminish the crowd very much!’

By one accord all the throng paused under the limes, careless how their stoppage incriminated themselves into his first category.

‘Listen!’ cried several voices. ‘That is Tricotrín there—ah! he is better than the theatres any day!’

And they gathered nearer about the lime trunk, curious to know what he could be doing there, with his board of plaster casts held in air, and his eyes laughing down on their up-turned faces. They were used to him in many phases; from a Harlequin dancing at their *barrière* balls, to a Gracchus leading them in years that were red with revolution.

Whether he danced with them, fought with them, laughed with them, or suffered with them, he was still their own:—Tricotrín.

Rapidly one and another joined the first speaker, and the group grew and grew, with the marvellous celerity of a city throng, and loitered about the linden tree that sheltered the bench where their favourite stood,—the board of plaster toys resting on his left arm, and the broad blossoming boughs flinging their shadows upon him.

‘Ah, my people of Paris!’ he cried to them. ‘Look at these things,—the little lad who owns them has not been able to sell one of them amongst you. How is that? You are not commonly loth to buy new toys; no nation spends its money sooner or wider upon playthings. The world knows that.

Why,—we are the great toy-shop of Europe. These are brittle, you say? Well, there is no gainsaying it. And they soil with a touch? I admit it. And they are hollow within, only masks at the best?—there is no question but that is true too. I grant every one of your objections. But are they anything new against playthings? I guess not.

‘Look at your pet toy—“prestige.” Is not that brittle enough? What a glittering, inflated, gold-bedizened, empty-stomached bladder, that a single blow from the cudgel of adversity breaks and shrivels into nought! Can you eat such a bladder, can you drink from it, can you feed hungry mouths on it, can you take voyages in it, can you trust it to be as sound and as solid as a nugget of ore, or as a loaf of brown bread?—of course not. Yet nine times out of ten you spend all your wealth on it, and you are so busy blowing with all your breath into it to send it higher, that you never notice the grave being dug at your feet, and your children being sucked down into it. Then how in justice can you urge that you will not purchase this plaster bust of Homer, because a crack will make it worthless?

‘But they soil so soon, you say;—what is the thing you love best to play with at your leisure, whether you be a noble drinking his wines, or a cobbler stitching his leather, a duke yawning in a palace, or a lemonade seller lying in the sun? Why—a woman’s name I fancy. How you toss

it up like a ball in the smoke-clouds of slander; how you pull the dainty down off it, as off a butterfly's wings; how you fling it from one to another, careless of everything except how you get your sport out of it! Well, I warrant you that not one of these vases, not one of these statues, can be smirched one half so swiftly as can a woman's fair fame. And off these you can scrape the soil; but off that you can never remove the stain you once have made on it.

'But they are hollow inside, you still urge?—Fie, for shame! What a plea that is! Have you the face to make it? If you have, let me bargain with you.'

'When all the love that is fair and false goes begging for believers, and all the passion that is a sham fails to find one fool to buy it:—when all the priests and politicians clap in vain the brazen cymbals of their tongues, because their listeners will not hearken to brass clangour, nor accept it for the music of the spheres:—when all the creeds, that feast and fatten upon the cowardice and selfishness of men, are driven out of hearth and home, and mart and temple, as impostors that put on the white beard of reverence and righteousness to pass current a cheater's coin:—when all the kings that promise peace while they swell their armouries and armies; when all the statesmen that chatter of the people's weal as they steal up to where the coronets are

kept; when all the men who talk of "glory," and prate of an "idea" that they may stretch their nations' boundary, and filch their neighbours' province;—when all these are no longer in the land, and no more looked on with favour, then I will believe your cry that you hate the toys which are hollow. Empty indeed these are—these little heads of Cupid and little groups of the Madonna,—but empty as they may be, they cannot be so hollow as those things that I have quoted, that you cherish, and adore, and purchase, and have faith in! Brittle, quick to soil, and a mere shell, with nothing in it! Why my plaster cast has copied most exactly all your toys of love and of ambition! Come buy them then! No excuse is left you. I have broken your excuses one by one, like the faggots in the fable!'

'We will buy them, Tricotrin! We will buy them at your own price!' cried twenty voices from the laughing throng below him.

He knew well how to deal with them, with that Paris crowd, so quickly moved to raillery, to wrong, to tears, to sympathy, to rage, with swifter mutations than any other crowds ever know.

'We will buy them! Throw them down to us!'

they shouted, thronging closer about the lime tree, and looking upward to his face on which the mellow sunset glow was falling.

He held up his hand with a gesture to them to



pause an instant; and the ironic gay scorn in his eyes softened, and a graver tenderness of regard shone on them.

‘Wait an instant: not for my sake. For the sake of a better thing—humanity. See here,—this is one of the shameful scandals of our cities. A child torn from his home, divorced from honest labour, set to a pretended trade, that by it he may cloak theft, spoiled for an honest citizen, that he may pander to the greed of an overseer too idle to labour for himself. If it be thus with the green wood, what will it be with the dry? If it be thus that the young children are reared, of what sort will their futures be? Ah—we enlarge the prisons, and we multiply the law courts, and we leave the school and the cradle to chance! We let the spawning beds multiply their poison; and we wonder that devil fish are all that swarm in our seas! This boy is innocent—as yet. But the choice is given him betwixt blows and theft, starvation and dishonesty. Who shall look for moral courage in a child to enable him to withstand where men succumb? Buy these toys at their own fair prices. You will do a good deed. But do it for the sake of the young thing that is in need and in hunger,—not for mine.’

Their answer was a shower of silver on the bench where he stood, and two-score hands were eagerly outstretched to seize and share the little casts and busts.

He parcelled them out amongst the throng, and took the coins from each, that from each was due, for the plaster thing that had been given in exchange for it. The surplus he forced back upon the buyers.

‘No,’ he said, as they pressed it upon him. ‘Give him his proper wage,—no alms. I asked for a kindly act, and you have done it. We will not teach him to look on sympathy as a mere goose with golden eggs, or he may one day kill the bird that now has saved him.’

Then, as rapidly as he had mounted the seat under the lime, he sprang down from it, thrust the money in the image boy’s hand, and was lost to sight within the doors of the wine-shop close behind his lime-tree.

The throng broke up. The people went on their ways; those who had obtained one of the white images, holding it tenderly as a precious relic. One very old woman from the seaboard of the west fondled with rapt adoration a little plaster medallion of which the value was, at uttermost, two copper pieces.

‘I will put it over my bed,’ she muttered. ‘It will keep disease away.’

She was close beside the door of a carriage as she spoke; its occupant heard her and leaned forward.

‘I will buy that medal from you—here is a gold piece.’

The old Vendéan, stupid and purblind, stared up



with dazzled eyes. She had all the avarice of the French peasant strong in her; she was but a rag-picker grovelling in perpetual filth; she lived miserably that she might have the miser's delight of hoarding a few silver pieces in an old earthen pot under the bricks of her stove. She had never owned so much as a broad golden piece all at once in her life; but she hugged her medallion closer, and shook her head in sturdy denial.

'I will not sell it,—no!'

'And why?'

The question was imperious and impatient, asked by one who was little used to brook or hear refusals.

'Because it came from Tricotrin,' muttered the toothless, withered, palsied crone, as she tottered on her way through the crowd.

She did not ask or heed who had spoken to her; she hated all those who drove in chariots. It had been just such a carriage as this, rolling rapidly to a king's festival, that had passed over the fair, slender body of the daughter of her youth, and crushed to pulp the delicate brown limbs;—and left her in her old age no better love than the earthen pipkin under the stove-bricks.

The great lady who had proffered her the gold for her plaster bas-relief, drove onward with a pang at her heart.

'An old creature that gleans her food from the gutters of the streets is truer to him than I have been!' she thought.



## CHAPTER XV.



IN a great palace of Rome a man lay sick unto death.

None were suffered to know it save himself, he made no moan at any one of the inward tortures that consumed him, he reclined by his lofty casement watching the rising of the moon, in what his household deemed the mere lassitude of long weakness.

He knew that he must die; whether in this night, or not for another year, he could not tell, nor science tell for him; but he knew that his doom was certain—as certain as that the moonlight was streaming white, and limpid, and clear as morning, through his vast, painted, silent chamber. But it was his own secret, and he had kept it. He meant thus to keep it until such time as the dumbness and greyness of dissolution should disclose it for him.

He was oftentimes racked with torment. The disease that had fastened on him is merciless, sparing not prince nor peasant; a vampire which, when once it has made fast its fangs, never leaves hold till its prey is slain. But he never suffered a complaint or a lament to escape from him. He was of delicate frame, of fragile strength; he had long been a scholar, an invalid, a recluse; none deemed it more than some slight increase of feebleness that bound him to his couch.

Into the mournful shadowy hues of his chamber, where, by his will, only the moonbeams shed radiance, there came a sudden golden blaze of light, a sudden odorous waft of perfume, a sudden flash of glorious beauty that came out from the gloom as the sun from a cloud.

These came with the entrance of a woman, behind whom two little pages bore two silver branches of wax lights.

She swept over the room as a swan sweeps over the water, and came to him, noiselessly, save for the soft shiver of her silken robes. She was beautiful, exceedingly; and on her face shone all the victory and proud security of a supreme power. As she moved, her diamonds gleamed on her breast and in her hair and in the folds of her skirts; she was attired for a costume ball at the Palace of the Doria, and had robed herself as Marie Antoinette de France, diademed and ermined in the full ceremonial of royalty.

She came to him and laid her white hand on his.

‘I trust you are better this evening?’

His eyes dwelt on her with an unutterable adoration.

‘I believe so,’ he answered simply. ‘I think I shall soon suffer nothing.’

Some accent in his voice attracted her; she regarded him more earnestly.

‘You do suffer, I fear?’ she asked.

‘A little—perhaps. In not being able to go with you, for instance. But I am weak, that is all.’

There are lies nobler than truth.

‘How magnificent you look to-night, my empress!’ he continued, gazing on her with rapt worship. ‘You grow more beautiful every hour! But why have you taken that part for yourself? A discrowned queen has nothing in common with *you!*’

She laughed slightly, glancing at her own vision in the opposite mirrored wall.

‘No, indeed! But I am Marie Antoinette in her omnipotence, in her glory. Nay! I am more than she. I am France personified! My costume is perfect?’

‘You are perfect—yes.’

He deemed her so: this exquisite thing, whom he called Wife, and in whose heart there was no throb for him, but only one passionate, all-absorbing love for his great rival of the world.

‘You see this diamond arrived in time?’ she continued, touching the centre stone of her necklace, of unusual size and brilliancy. ‘I was so afraid it might be retarded on its way through the East, though a courier travelled night and day with it.’

He smiled indulgently—as to a spoiled child.

‘I bade them get it here, if any way possible, by this evening. You have now the largest jewel out of the European regalias. Those trifles are a woman’s pride, I know.’

A spasm, whose suffering he could not entirely conceal with all his fortitude, changed his colour and caught his breath a moment as he spoke. She looked at him quickly.

‘I am afraid you are more ill than usual? Had I not better stay with you?’

There were compassion and the desire to testify it in the offer; but he knew well that it was the accent of duty, not of affection, that spoke in it. He strove to smile again as he replied to it.

‘Stay!—and leave the Dorian ball? Stay!—and sacrifice that superb costume for which your diamond has travelled, expressly, the whole way from Benares? Nay—I am not so selfish, my beautiful one. You are not made to be chained down to a sick couch in all your youth and all your loveliness.’

‘It is I who am selfish—not you,’ she said, hurriedly, in a momentary pang of conscience and of self-accusation.

‘Selfish? Oh, no,—wait until I reproach you to reproach yourself. Is it not one of the few pleasures that my life has known to be certain that you are happy? Go—you are late as it is; and make the world say once more, what it has so often said already, that all its kingdoms do not hold a creature so victorious and so beautiful as my Wife!’

She smiled; her life was so steeped in flattery, that it seemed only the daily utterance of what was her natural due. She was rejoiced to go; she had felt fearful lest he might accept the offer that her duty had wrung from her. She stooped, and lightly touched his forehead with her lips, and turned with her soft, languid grace from his couch.

‘You are right; it is late,’ she said, as she glanced at a timepiece, and floated away through the length of the chamber, the lights which her pages bore falling on the flashing jewels of the royal dress of France.

The world waited for her, the world and all its homage. And—for the husband whom she left there,—had he not his reward? Would not every man whose sight beheld her beauty to-night, envy his possession of herself?

It was enough; she had repaid him.

His eyes followed her with a terrible yearning love that hungered for one backward glance, one farewell word;—none came, she passed out without one lingering look, one last good-night. She was

thinking of the world that waited for her in the Palace of the Dorias.

The lights passed away, the curtain fell behind them, the trailing of her train upon the marble floor ceased to break the silence. He was left alone. And he covered his face with his hands, and shuddered as with cold, the dews of anguish standing on the brow that her lips had brushed as lightly and as carelessly as the wings of a butterfly brush the face of a corpse. He would have borne the throes of ten thousand deaths to spare her one throb of pain,—and he was no more to her than the glittering stones that shone on her fair bosom; nay, not one tithe so much! Honour, affluence, gladness, luxurious ease, imperial pomp, and all the homage that the world will only render to those who can command it, had come through his hand to her. Through him she was throned on high, where perpetual summer and everlasting sunlight were her portion, where the storm of calamity, and the chill of poverty, and the scorch of shame, never more could touch her. Through him, the desire of her soul was given unto her; and the crown of greatness was set on her proud brows, in lieu of the brand of bastardy, and of the thorn-wreaths of vain ambition, and of disappointed effort. Through him all things that she had craved had become hers without price or penalty. And his reward was that men grudgingly counted the years of his life that were set as a

barrier betwixt them and her loveliness ! And that to this exquisite thing—cruel without intent, and unwitting of the pain that fed her pleasure, as infants when they catch at butterflies—he was only as the treasury from which the gold that was needed for her triumphs came, as the mine whence the jewels of her regalia were drawn, as the magician whose wand summoned around her the splendours of an enchanted world.

He lavished all that the earth held upon his idol. And she—she was not so much moved by all his priceless gifts as in the days of her childhood she had been moved by a single branch of dog-roses, a single horn of silvered sweetmeats, from another's hand.

She was radiant, thoughtless, mutable, capricious, surrendered to the indulgence of every whim, and forgetful of the hand from which the power of such indulgence came,—it is ever on natures such as this that love is poured out most abundantly ; natures that rejoice in its effect, but no more heed its root than the bee heeds the roots of the flower-bell that it despoils of its honey.

In her heart he knew not one pulse beat for him.

In her absence he knew not one thought turned to him.

In her future he knew not one memory would be faithful to him.

And this bitterness was greater to him than all the bitterness of death.

For he suffered also that jealousy which, arising in noble natures, will never stoop to suspicion, but yet it is the inevitable offspring of that possession of a beloved life, which is not also possession of the soul within that life.

He did not fear the safety of his honour. She was proud, she was truthful, she was of high courage; such women do not carry shame to their husbands' hearths. But—she was so young, she was so beautiful, she was so hourly besieged by all the honeyed eloquence of passion, and he—he was left here, old ere his time, powerless to attract or enchain her, grey, weary, hopeless, paralyzed with a piteous disease. When he bade her go forth into the world where her lovers wooed her ear, and every whisper that stirred the air was a whisper to forget himself, he reached that martyrdom of the soul of which the world knows nought, but which surpasses in its fortitude and in its torture every martyrdom of the body.

The night was very still; through the lofty casements the lustrous Roman moon shone white; the great chamber was hushed like a grave. He lay there long with his face hidden, and no sign of life within him, save now and then a quiver of his limbs as the canker of death within him dealt him some sharper blow.

A dreamy sense of exhaustion and of peace slowly stole on him, stilling his suffering, but stilling with it the life in his veins. His attendants, alarmed at his long silence, drew noiselessly near, and fearing to disturb what might be merely peaceful sleep, stood inactive round his couch. His physicians, hastily summoned, saw that it was sleep indeed, the sleep that knows no awakening. They raised him, and his eyes unclosed with the old gentle smile they knew so well.

‘This is death?’ he asked.

‘Seek the Duchess—quick!’ they whispered low; but not so low that the words failed to catch the ear of the dying man.

‘No, no!’ he murmured. ‘Tell her nothing. It would spoil her pleasure!’—


And his last breath faded from his lips in that last thought for her.

He lay dead in the moonlight that streamed about him—fair, cold, pitiless, radiant as the life that he had cherished.

In Rome on the morrow, men, speaking together of the last of the once-famous Dukes of Lirà, said that he had made no mark upon the world save by his strange marriage; and laid many wagers as to who in Europe would be likeliest to marry his fair Duchess.



## CHAPTER XVI.

HE noon sun shone on some few breadths of corn-land lying on a southern hill-side, above a winding road, where one little white, brown-roofed chalet alone stood looking down into the small, cool, dark blue lake that slept below.

The corn was brown and ripe; the circle of the seasons had brought the harvest-time again; the wheat was full in ear; and, with the yellow riches of the neighbouring gourds and the fruit of some goodly olive trees hard by, would give wealth enough for a peasant of the Pyrenées to be well content withal. Yet the owner of the nook of arable land upon the chestnut-clothed slope was weeping piteously, like Rachel refusing to be comforted, like Rachel having lost her son into the twilight of an unknown fate.

It was the grief of Grand'mère for Antoine ; it was the grief of a million mothers when the sickle of State-Lust gathers in the budding corn of the young lives they love ; it was the grief of which Théroigne de Méricourt was ignorant when in answer to the reproach—' why will ye women breed in servitude, why are ye not as the desert beasts that losing liberty are fruitless ? '—she replied, ' Did not the child smile in his mother's face for all that Nero or Tiberius reigned ? '

Under Tyrannies the children may smile, because they know not what Birth has brought them ; but under Tyrannies the mothers weep. And in revolution the reddest hand, the voice most shrill and pitiless, are the hand and the voice of a woman.

This woman, old and feeble, lamented for the son of her elder years whom the conscription had taken—taken from his peaceful mountain home, and his pastoral games, and his corn raised with so much labour on the arid soil just as its harvest crowned his toil.

She stood on the stone sill of her little dwelling, and beside her stood a man in the loose linen shirt of the people, with a violin under his arm and a little black monkey playing at his feet.

' It is the conscription ! ' she cried, wringing her hands—slender hands, for she had been city born, and could not aid herself as could the sturdy women of the southern land. ' The conscription ! See how

the government devours us. All the youngest and bravest, and best, drawn away to rot in the battle-fields !’

‘Chut, good friend,’ said her companion’s mellow voice, that was in itself a sound of consolation. ‘Blame not the government. Blame the war-lusts of men’s souls. Look you,—if the people governed, I doubt not but they would be as cruel. A republic and peace we say—ay, we shall get them, perchance, in paradise. Not here. The people, everywhere, are hot and hasty and blind in judgment; they would rush into wars the instant that their jealousy, or their vanity, smarted. And then the youths would go to the slaughter. See how it was with them in the days of Argonne and Jemappes.’

‘That may be,’ moaned the bereaved mother. ‘But they would not take the lad from the plough, the boy from earning his grandam’s bread, the child with the down on his cheek from the herd of goats that was all his store. They would have pity—’

‘On their own class? Possibly. They would stay at home themselves, and send the poet, the scholar, the artist, the statesman, out to the storms of the grape-shot! Oh, yes! But would that come nearer justice, my friend?’

‘I do not know!’ sobbed the woman, inconsolable. ‘I only know Bernal is gone!’

‘Ah!’ murmured Tricotrin. ‘That is all most

of you know of justice,—how she looks through your own little eyelet-hole! Listen here, Aimée Herbalez, we all have our burdens; but it depends on ourselves how long we carry them. The conscription is hard, that I grant you; and were the bodies of men well-trained to arms, and their minds to tolerance, there need be no conscription, because there would be no war. But while the world wags as it does, men must be patriots, and every patriot must be a soldier if necessity arise. And Bernal was a lad of spirit; he would not have been easy in your little nook all his days. Who knows?—he may carry the Bâton in his knapsack? There was a rough peasant boy once, down in the south, in whose fate it was written to sit on the throne of the great Gustavus,—and his race reigns to-day. Who can tell what Bernal may not reach?’

‘He would be as far from me if he were a king!’ murmured the despairing Herbalez. ‘It is good of you to talk so, and it is true that the boy was well pleased to go into the army, promising to get covered all over with orders. But ah!—they talk of the stars and the crosses, and they die in a ditch!’

‘Supreme truth! Thousands rot at an Austerlitz, and one man goes home a conqueror. If I kill a single creature for a bag of gold coins, I am guillotined as a murderer; if I kill a million creatures for a diadem of gold, I am worshipped as a hero. Singular arithmetic and ethics! But hark you—’



‘They die in a ditch!’ wailed the woman. ‘My bright innocent boy!—he is gone into the hell of Paris, where he will forget his God and me; and they will draught him out to that hideous Cayenne, where they say no strong man can breathe and live!’

‘What regiment have they drafted him into?’

She told him between her sobs.

‘All right! Only the second battalion will go to Cayenne. I know something of that regiment’s commanders,—for that matter I did them a turn one night down an African defile, when it went hard with them against a band of plunderers. I will see what I can do to get Bernal left with the first battalion at Toulouse. Toulouse is not so far but you can look at him now and then. So take heart! The boy shall come back here with his lieutenancy if we can get him one; and—meantime, your corn is spoiling!’

‘What matter the corn!’ she cried, impetuously. ‘What matter the corn if you can save my boy? God reward you! You are ever like sunshine in a desolate place. You are ever full of generous thoughts!’

‘Chut! In my own life I suck the sweetness from my cocoa-nuts, and only eat the flesh of my dates, like the wise Arabian lad; but when I see my fellow-creatures persistently eating their cocoa-husks and their date-stones, and getting no other

nourishment, I do my best to set them right. And the corn?’

‘Ah, it is a terrible thing about the corn,’ sighed the woman, losing her ideal grief in her practical care, through that necessity which is at once the slave-driver and the solacer of the poor. ‘Bernal was just going to reap it; and the neighbours in the valley have their own business, and I am a weak, useless thing, and one night’s storm would lay it and kill it—’

‘Assuredly. I will get it in by sunset.’

‘You!’

‘Well! Why not? Have I not worked in the fields before now?’

‘But that was in play?’

Though he lived with them and like them, felt with them and like them, there was about him that which the people of every land instinctively obeyed and yielded to as the sovereignty of one above them. Superstition, growing out of reverence and love, gave him many strange attributes, and lofty antecedents; and to behold him one day claim the kingship of the world would not have been too great a glory for him in the sight of the peasantry that worshipped him.

‘In play? Indeed, no. I worked for a wage. I am indolent enough, good Herbalez, as you know; how many hours I lie in the sun as lazy as a lazzarone! It will do me good to get in your wheat.

Corn will talk to us, if we listen, better than most men,—what sermons in the full ripe ears that have sprung out of a seed that had looked dead; what poems in the blue cornflower that grows amongst the wheat, like the poetry that springs through the busy lives of men; what rebukes in the brave, patient lark that builds so boldly, though the reaping-hook may cut her little body in two! Come, give me the sickle, there is no time to lose; by the violet of the skies there is a rain-storm due before to-morrow.'

With fervent thanks she gave him the classic tool, and stood awed and wondering as he went to the work. To the literal mind of the woman, which was unpoetic but yet superstitious, it was easier to believe that miracles happened, and that the wheat and the blossoms really had tongues for him, than to follow the fantastic fancy which for him filled them both with meaning.

He was soon in the little field,—belted in by the chestnuts, and sultry with the ardent sun of August—in a corner of which he put down his knapsack, his blouse, and Mistigri, who being a spoilt little epicurean, sat amongst the corn stalks, disdainfully biting a wheat ear now and then, and making a grimace at it.

'This is the way, Mistigri,' he murmured to his single confidant and companion. 'When dark hours are down, work through them. No exorcism

charms like labour. Men's souls were never made to dwell in night shadows like the owls. To repine for oneself is something so narrow and mean. While one has health, and strength, and sight, and liberty, is it not rank blasphemy to say one has not happiness? Ah, Mistigri, there was a beauty in the Mexican's cultus that is missing from the modern creeds. To toss wine heavenward, with kisses, when the sun rose—such a rite meant Gratitude and Rejoicing. And then Christians went with fire and sword, with the Bible of the Jews and the Inquisition of the Spaniards, to massacre all those bright worshippers by way of teaching them a better religion! Paf! Give me the Pagans.'

Mistigri nodded assent, being a little Pagan herself; and Tricotrin bent himself to his work, the hot sun shining on the brown corn, the yellow-winged orioles flying through the light, the poppies and cornflowers bowing under the sickle, the little bright-eyed mice scampering off, as their nests were laid bare, into the chestnut wood belting the field.

He worked fast and unremittingly; he was glad of the labour. Down below there, far away in the valley, were some delicate spires and mighty towers bowered in wood. They were the spires and towers of the Château de Lirà.

As he worked, four gay equipages, with outriders all a-glitter in scarlet and silver, passed at a rapid pace below, along the road winding at the bottom

of the slope. He paused to gaze at them, shading his eyes with his hand.

‘That is our Châtelaine,’ said the widow, who had come out to bring him a jug of red wine and a roll of bread. ‘That is the beautiful creature I told you of—the great Duchess.’

‘Yes,’ he answered her simply; and he took up his sickle, and went to work afresh, while the sound of the horses’ feet still rang on the rocky road below.

‘This is the first summer season she has been here,’ resumed the woman, sitting down with her knitting on the ledge of the wooden pale. ‘The Duke never came here after his marriage: that took place far away north, out of France. We heard of it, and the people were well-pleased; they hoped to have great gaieties at the château once more. But it was not so; they were always in Paris, or in foreign countries; we heard that he died abroad: and she did not come at all; never until this summer, and now,—now,—she makes up for the long absence! Such extravagance, such pleasures, such hundreds of guests, such a life—such a life! They do nothing but feast themselves like princes, and my boy Bernal is drawn for the wars!’

She dropped twelve stitches in her knitting-work,—like many other democrats who leave long gaps in their own work, because they must stay away from it to rail at an Order.

‘ She is not generous to those that are poor, then ? ’ he asked, bending still at his work.

Bernal’s mother shrugged her shoulders.

‘ I do not suppose she ever remembers that there is anybody living who has not cakes, and wine, and oil, every day ! Generous ? What do you call generous, Tricotrin ? They roast a hundred fowls I have heard tell in her kitchen every day ; they drink wine that has real sparks of gold in it ; they laugh and sing, and saunter all their hours away ; they sleep in satin sheets,—so they say : what good is that to us ? If you were to go up and ask for your very life you could not see her ; I did try when my boy was taken : well ! how was it ? A servant spoke to another servant, and that servant sent a page, and the page mocked me and sent another, and that other went to some great man with a silver chain on him, who rebuked me, and told me I was a rude woman, but I might go to the kitchens and ask for food. Food !—they would have given me broken bones when I had lost Bernal to the army ! No,—she is a fair thing ; she has a face like the sun, but she is cold, she is hard, she has no thought for the people. Tricotrin—if the Revolution came again I could find it in my heart to see her stripped and scourged, and made to eat the bread of bitterness. Look how she enjoys while we suffer ! ’

The old rankling jealousy, natural, yet so cruel, that lies at the root of all social antagonism, was

acid and almost savage in the words : he did not answer her, but reaped the corn in silence, while she knitted on, striving to recover her lost stitches ; but the gap that had been made would not close,—in eagerness for a revolution of the future she had spoiled her labour of the hour.

There are many reformers like the Widow Herbalez.

By sunset the little golden store was reaped and set in sheaves,—the graceful sheaves of English form, with withes of wild convolvulus, and scarlet heads of poppy bound up within the wheat. He was free from his self-imposed duty ; he left the great white Pyrenean dog of the place on guard amongst the little harvest ; and went down the hill-side pursued by the blessings and the thanks of the conscript's mother. ' Gratitude is a lively sense of favours to come ; ' and she knew that she must look to him to carry it for grinding to the water-mill in the village down below, where the foaming mountain river grew quieter, and watered peacefully green stretches of meadow-land.

There, in the valley, beneath his feet, not more than a league off, were the towers of the château, and the wide dark masses of park and forest woodland ; with lakes, and islets, and rocks, and streams, amidst them, and in their front the glorious panorama of the mountains.

From the centre tower of the pile was floating

the scarlet standard of the Lirà; with the golden hawk, with outstretched wings, of their insignia, glittering in the rays of the setting sun.

He descended the hill-side with the lithe swiftness of the mountaineer, and passed through the scattered homesteads of the little hamlet, that were chiefly gathered about the side of the river, and had their white walls hidden under thickets of myrtle and olive.

The day's toil was over: the young men and maidens were playing the rough wrestling games of the district, or dancing the Moresco dances, that still linger there as the sign of the Saracenic days of yore: the old women were sitting spinning, nodding their grey heads together, amidst the babble of their grandchildren; they were all very poor; they all led simple, homely, patriarchal lives; but they were happy, their youth had the gay grace, and their old age had the smiling content, that belong to France alone.

He scattered amongst the children a basketful of cherries that he had bought on the hill-side, of an old woman who was seeing her ruddy store likely to rot away for want of a buyer in that lonely place: then he went from one group to another with cheerful words, as his habitude was; and gathered the wishes and wants of the little community. Both were humble enough:—a goat for the sake of its milk, a hank of flax for the spinning; a purchaser



for the over-ripe melons; a necklace of priest-blessed beads; a smile from the bishop as he passed on his mule through this, his far-distant, and rarely-visited, flock; an acre more ground to some young lover's small patrimony so that he could wed where he loved: all these in the little world played the part that crowns, and honours, and riches, and fair fame, and fierce passion, played in the great world unknown to them.

One young child, beautiful as some mediæval painter's seraph, with that angelic spiritual regard which belongs to southern climes, pouted with a pretty scorn at her playmate's cherries, and came and leaned in grave disdain over her mother's knee.

'Dost thou not care for the fruit, Angelique?' asked the mother, reproachfully, smiling the while at Tricotrin who stood by.

The child's fair face clouded with petulant disdain.

'No! I want more gold toys, mother!'

'Ah!' said the woman, half-smiling still, but sadly. 'Thy chain has spoiled all thy pleasures! A week ago, look you, our Duchess up yonder saw Angelique as she passed, and laughed and tossed her a gold jewel off her wrist. It just fitted the baby's throat; but it has made her so vain,—there is no telling how to please her now.'

Angelique lifted proudly her little fair throat,

with the gold links glittering round it, her eyes shining and rapturous.

‘I will not play with *them*!’ she said, tossing her head towards her playmates. ‘They have only strings of yew berries or dried peas!—and she never called them beautiful!’

‘Hush, hush! A careless word does mischief,’ murmured her mother deprecatingly to Tricotrin. ‘To give it to the child was very good, very generous, but the gifts of the great are—’

‘Honey that moulds into poison! Your Angelique was happy in her necklace of yew berries, and now, —the lust of gold is sown, and gold does not grow like the yews. She gives much,—your Châtelaine?’

An old woman—very old—lifted blind patient eyes where she sat under the chestnuts.

‘She saw me sitting in the sun, in the park, the other day, and she spoke softly to me, and she shook her purse into my lap,—I counted twelve pieces, and Vevette found them every one of gold! She is an angel.’

‘Caprice!’ muttered an old charcoal-burner. ‘Only a caprice, like the chain to little Ange. Her stewards tax us for every rotten twig of wood, till we can scarce keep body and soul together. She is a tyrant.’

‘We have only gourds and a stray onion to chew,’ muttered a herdsman, ‘and her dogs eat the fat of the land. She is an aristocrat.’

‘Her flowers have fires all winter, and we shiver and starve.’

‘Her life is a fairy tale; how should she know what it is to have only a knob of black bread once in twenty-four hours?’

‘She spends all her substance in Paris; and then her foresters grudge us a quail we have killed with a stone!’

‘Her outriders lamed Bertrand’s child for life, and she was laughing in her carriage,—she never saw, she never heard.’

‘Her fêtes cost a million francs a night, every night of last week, and they say each tree that was lit up cost as much as would keep a man for a twelve-month.’

‘But it was beautiful, we could see the light here?’ pleaded a handsome young goatherd. ‘And she has a face like God’s own people!’

‘She gave me my chain!’ cried little Angélique.

‘And my twelve pieces!’ muttered the blind woman.

‘All that will not put a slice of beef in our pots, with the garlic; nor yet mend Bertrand’s boy’s broken knee,’ said the charcoal-burner, gloomily, in summary and conclusion.

Tricotrin, standing under the chestnut, heard in silence; then wished them good-night, and walked on as Mistigri leapt to his shoulder.

‘ Ah, little one ! ’ he murmured to her. ‘ How the hotbed of the world has heated and strengthened the faults and the follies !—yet the higher nature lives still, and the gift goes to the child, the gold pieces to the blind woman. Will it ever wake wholly and reign again ? Yes, perhaps :—if ever she love ! ’

Meanwhile, under the chestnuts, the blithe talk of the aged women grew silent ; the little Angelique pouted apart, vexed with herself for having scorned her share of the cherries ; the charcoal-burner sat moodily musing of things of the old Revolution of which his grandsire had told him ; the young herdsman would not join in the Sarabande, but wandered away thinking of the face ‘ like one of God’s people,’ that belonged to his proud châtelaine, and gazing wistfully upward at the lights that began to gleam through the wood of the château.

The bright and light-hearted content and communion of their lives had been dimmed, and been broken :—the world had sent amidst them the visible presence of its devil-empress, Wealth.

He, himself, went onward through the valley, through the deep belt of the woods, through the avenues of the park. The whole front of the antique building was lighted, and the painted oriels gleamed ruby, and amber, and soft brown, in the dusky evening, through the green screen of foliage.

The fragrance of the orange alleys, and of the

acres of flowers, was heavy on the air ; there was the sound of music borne down the low southerly wind ; here and there through the boughs was the dainty glisten of gliding silks :—it was such a scene as once belonged to the terraces and gardens of Versailles.

From beyond the myrtle fence and gilded railings which severed the park from the pleasaunce, enough could be seen, enough heard, of the brilliant revelry within to tell of its extravagance, and its elegance, in the radiance that streamed from all the illumined avenues.

He stood and looked long ;—hearing the faint echo of the music, seeing the effulgence of the light through the dark myrtle barrier.

A very old crippled peasant, searching in the grass for truffles, with a little dog, stole timidly up and looked too.

‘How can it feel, to live like *that* ?’ he asked, in a wistful tremulous voice.

Tricotrin did not hear : his hand was grasped on one of the gilded rails with a nervous force as from bodily pain.

The old truffle-gatherer, with his little white dog panting at his feet, crossed himself as he peered through the myrtle screen.

‘God !’ he muttered, ‘how strange it seems that people are there who never once knew what it was to want bread, and to find it nowhere, though

the lands all teemed with harvest ! They never feel hungry, or cold, or hot, or tired, or thirsty : they never feel their bones ache, and their throat parch, and their entrails gnaw :—these people ought not to get heaven, they have it on earth !’

Tricotrin heard at last ; he turned his head and looked down on the old man’s careworn hollow face.

‘ “ Verily, they have their reward,” you mean ? Nay, that is a cruel religion—which would excruciate hereafter those who enjoy now ! Judge them not ; in their laurel crowns there is full often twisted a serpent. The hunger of the body is bad indeed, but the hunger of the mind is worse perhaps ; and from that they suffer, because from every fulfilled desire springs the pain of a fresh satiety.’

The truffle-hunter, wise in his peasant-fashion, gazed wistfully up at the face above him, half comprehending the answer.

‘ It may be so,’ he murmured. ‘ But then—they *have* enjoyed ! Ah, Christ ! that is what I envy them. Now we,—we die, starved amidst abundance ; we see the years go, and the sun never shines once in them ; and all we have is a hope—a hope that may be cheated at last. For none have come back from the grave to tell us whether *that* fools us as well.’

So saying, he heavily shouldered his kriel of truffles, and turned away sadly.

Tricotrin turned also, and laid his hand on the rush basket, and swung it over his own back.

‘I will carry it home for you,’ he said to the feeble old cripple. ‘We will have some more words together: and you shall give me a night’s lodging.’

‘Willingly! But I have only a wattle hut in the forest?—’

‘What matter? I can sleep outside it, under the pines. I have done that oftentimes. There is no more fragrant bedchamber,—not even where great ladies rest.’

He glanced back at the distant gardens where the lights, and the music, and the guests of the evening festival were.

‘She is happy: what matter that she forgets?’ he thought, as he went back with the old woodsman into the shadow of the pine and the chestnut forests.

The little hut stood hidden in one of the deepest recesses of the great sylvan growth which, watered by innumerable subterranean branches of the river, that was fed with every spring tide by the melted snows of the mountains, resisted the withering scorch of the southern suns. It was a small rough place, bare as a hermit’s cell, and strewn with dried water-rushes; truffles were scarce in the district, and for them there were swifter and abler seekers than the cripple of eighty years.

He had been born in the Lirà forests, and had lived in them all his days, first as a charcoal-burner, then, when his strength failed him, and he had broken his knee down a ravine, by seeking for the dainty root that savours the rich man's banquet. Of any world lying beyond them, he had but the vague conception of a child : days and nights, and months and years, had all gone by with him under the broad fans of the pines and the chestnuts, the seasons only measured to him by the budding of the rosy leaves, and the falling of the golden cones. Yet he was patient, and laborious, and wise in his own way, like one of the gentle beavers that built their wooden cities in the lake beside his home.

'You have always lived alone?' Tricotrin asked him, as he sat at the hut door, smoking, as the moon rose and silvered all the delicate colonnades of the pine stems.

'Not always.'

'Not always? How is it then that you are so now?'

'How does it always happen when we outlive those we love? Men are foolish who grow old.'

'Rather,—men are foolish who hang on other lives! You had children once?'

The old man came forward into the moonlight, and sat himself down on a broken tree-root; he was very grateful to the stranger who had pitied him, he was glad to break his accustomed loneliness and silence by speech.

‘I had one child ; and I had a young wife whom I loved well. How many years is it since then ? I cannot tell : another life, surely, it looks so long ago. Madelon lived here,—yes, here. It seems strange to think of now. She was so pretty, and so brown, and so blithe ; just like one of the robins. And she was always singing ; sometimes I hear her voice amongst the leaves still. We buried her under that pine,—the one with a cross cut out on the bark, —but I always fancy myself that her soul passed into one of the birds. She was always fond of them ; they were always fluttering about her. Is it possible, think you ?’

He did not wait for an answer : he did not wish his fancy disturbed.

‘Madelon had a little daughter ; I did not care so much for her. It seemed cruel that when *she* died that life stolen from hers lived on ?—you know what it is that I mean ? Well,—the child,—Madelon too she was named,—grew up ; and I was very gentle with her because she had no mother. They said in the forest here, and up at the château, that she was much lovelier than my Madelon had been : it might be so, she was not so fair in my sight. The child was always happy, singing too, making chains of berries and flowers, and looking at her own face as she saw it in the lake water. The great people up at the château—this was forty years ago, and more, what I talk of now, and they were very gay and

brilliant there then, just as Miladi is now—took a fancy to her, and she went away with one of the princesses, in her service they told me. I was very loth, —I was all alone,—and she had the voice of my Madelon. But she wept, and fretted, and raved, and said she should die in the forest : what could I do ? She was just like a bird in a cage ; and if I had kept the cage closed she would have given me no song, and men would have said I was cruel. So she went, —pretty volatile thing. Went where ?—that is what I cannot tell. She was as blithe in her flight as any young pigeon. I suppose she was happy. The seasons went by ; those chestnuts four times were all pink with their buds ; four times the brown fruit dropped out of their pods. I never saw Madelon all that time. Day after day I went to the château ; I could hear nothing : she was with the princess, they said. I suppose the world is very large, is it not ? By-and-by that great lady came again to stay at the château ; I saw her face as she rode past one day. By dint of much prayer and entreaty I got to see her,—it was hard work for weeks to do so,—when I spoke with her she could not understand me ; those great people have a different tongue to ours ; but she was very gentle, and I could see she grieved for me, and she told me through her servant that she had lost sight of Madelon some years : that the girl had been with her but a brief season, and then had grown bad,—bad,—bad,—and had gone to be a rich, wicked

woman, with the gold of the nobles. I do not know what I did, what I said, I have forgotten ; it is long ago. But they told me I fell down in some fit ; and it is true that after that time I was never strong, and my left arm I could not lift again. I never blamed the man that misused Madelon, look you ; if a woman-child have no heart and no soul, and longs to be vile because she is dull in her home, why,—she is like the nightshade flower, she will bear poison let you plant her where you will. I never blamed him ; but I was glad that her mother was dead. And—do you know one thing ?—the birds have never sung blithely since.’

‘Never—to you,’ Tricotrin answered him, softly. ‘And you have heard no more of her ?’

‘No more. She never came back. Why should she ? I am only an old lame man, and for the birds and the trees and the flowers the girl never cared. She was not like my Madelon who loved them. Yet I am wrong to say I never heard again : I did hear once, twenty or more years after. There came a letter to me, I cannot read, I took it to the curé down in the village yonder, not the one that is there now, the dead one. He read it out to me : it was from a sailor somewhere in what they call the Riviera. It was a simple kindly letter, to tell me that he was going to wed a pretty child ; who he thought was my grandchild by what he knew of her mother’s history. The letter had been ten months

in finding me; it was ill-addressed; the priest replied to it for me, but I never heard again. So whether it was true or not I cannot tell.'

' Might I see it ? '

' Surely. I have kept it by me.'

He went into his hut, and after some minutes' absence, returned with an old yellow paper.

' Here it is. You can read, I dare say ? '

Tricotrín took it; and read: it was a barely decipherable scrawl, very clumsily and laboriously written; pathetic through its gentle and homely simplicity. It set forth, in few words, that the writer was about to become the husband of an orphan girl who was known to be the bastard daughter of one of the nobles of France, though brought up amongst the fishing people: it went on to say that her mother had never been seen on that shore, but, dying lately in Paris, had bequeathed her some jewels, a little gold, the declaration that she was her offspring by a princely lover, and the injunction to endeavour to learn whether an old man of the name of Aubin Ralcor was still living in the forests of Lirà; this was signed Madelon Ralcor, commonly known as Pearl Rosalba, and had been dictated from the dying bed of the testatrix. The sailor also wrote that he would die of starvation ere ever he touched the store of gold and gems; but that he earnestly desired to seek out, and be as a son to, the old man Aubin Ralcor, whom he supposed the grandsire of his be-

loved: he subscribed himself in kindly appealing phrase—Jean Bruno.

The letter fell from Tricotrin's hand upon the mossy ground: he sat in silence, gazing out down the silvered avenue of pines: this homely tragedy touched him at every turn, and moved him with its deep-rooted sadness that had darkened three generations. What cruel play of fate's caprices had thus lodged the peace of these men of simple soul, and honest love, in the hands of these women, whose impulses led them from innocence, whose instincts launched them towards vice;—who saw only a wearisome sameness in the passion that clung to them too fondly; who had no other thought than to cheat it, betray it, forsake it? Born from the simple peasant girl whose grave was made under the cross-marked pine, they had uprisen, like upas trees, destroying all who rested near them: the old eternal mystery of guilt begot of innocence, of Commodus begot of Antoninus.

He folded up the page and gave it back to Ralcor. What avail was it to deal him the fresh pain of such a story as the sole one he could tell of Bruno's wife—of Coriolis?

'A well-meant, tender letter,' he said. 'Did you never hear more from him?'

'Never. The priest answered for me, as I say; for I would willingly have seen Madelon's daughter. But whether he ever had the reply or not I cannot

tell. No news came from him. It is best so perhaps. I would rather be left alone with the forest. It knows me as they never could do.'

'And is there nothing you desire then?'

'No. I shall be glad to die, that is all.'

'And leave your forest?'

'I shall not leave it. They will bury me there by the pine. It will be the same thing, only quieter. To live hardly is all well enough when one is young;—only a crust—what matter? One has the spring of the deer, the heart of the eagle, the speed of the hound. But when one is old,—it is not worth while. The mill takes so much labour to turn; and so little corn comes from it.'

With these words he rose, and bade his stranger friend good night, and went within, and fell upon his knees before his little wooden crucifix, roughly made from two pine-branches, and prayed with the guileless faith of childhood;—half-senseless, half-sublime.

Tricotrin remained without, in the bright calm moonlight of the forest aisle.

The belling of the deer sounded down the wind; the soft owls flitted through the dusk, the glow-worms glimmered underneath the moss: and far beyond across the woods in the great château, the light, the laughter, the dance, the song, the love-jest, passed the hours away as though there were no such memories as crime, or grief, or shame on earth.

'She is happy,' he said half aloud, to little

Mistigri, as he looked at the far-off towers of the mighty place, and mused at the tragedy hidden beneath the simple and obscure lives which on their surface bore only the rough illiterate homeliness of a sailor's and a woodman's toil. 'She is happy; what matter the rest? She would have gone to the evil of these women, Mistigri, if she had stayed with us; not for love of the sin or the shame, but for love of the "great world" she craved, for escape from the peasant-life she detested: she would have been like Madelon, like Coriolis. True: there is scant worth in an honour only reared into growth under the hothouse shade of fair circumstance. But those frail things of womanhood are no stronger than flowers: they grow straightly, or crookedly, as they blossom in fresh air, or foul; and if we only care for a rose we lead it up to the sunlight, we do not stamp it down into the swamp in its bud. I was a coward perhaps; I feared that her life should ever reproach me. If we had seen her fallen, wretched, cursing men, and by them cursed, what remorse we should have felt—you and I—Mistigri! And yet—'

And yet?

Were the pomp, and the pride, and the careless glory, and the graceful contempt, of the life that she led, so much nobler after all than the sin of Madelon, than the shame of Coriolis? Was not their root the same passion though their blossom was triumph where the other fruit had been bitterness? The one

grew as the palm, whose stately height and lordly crown of greenest leaf towered in perpetual summer, the idol of every passer-by: the other grew as the belladonna, whose purple brilliancy of flower turned into the poison that bore death to all toyers with it, cursed aloud as men left it on the highway to be trodden down by each strange foot: but they sprang alike from the same soil of ambitious desire, they were alike fanned by the same winds of impatient and feverish longing.

The one carried a green crown of honour; the other but acrid berries of slaughter: yet the sap feeding their veins was the same—it was the passion of the feminine instinct for pleasure, for gain, and for homage.

The passion that has cursed the earth since the primeval age; as the Hebrew poets saw, even in the days of the world's youth, when they created its parallel and parable in the metaphorical poem of Eve, in the allegorical picture of Eden.



## CHAPTER XVII.



AT noon, the following day, he went up the vast flight of steps that led from the garden to the doors of the magnificent feudal pile, palace and fortress in one, that crowned the brow of the hill throned amidst its darkling pine woods.

‘The Duchess de Lirà is within?’ he asked of a group of footmen, lounging inside the courts.

One of them raised his insolent head.

‘The Duchess left here early to-day; she is gone to the royal marriage at Madrid.’

He turned, and passed away down the great marble stairs, without answer.

‘What could that fellow want with our Lady?’ said the footman to his peers. ‘If she had been here she would never have seen him—a strolling player with a fiddle at his back.’



## CHAPTER XVIII.



HE snow fell once more thickly over the roofs and streets of the city of Paris.

In the little by-lane of the Latin quarter wherein Mère Rose had dwelt, all the quaint angles and gables and jutting angles were white with the fallen flakes ; all the leaded dusky panes were glittering yet dim with frost ; the empty linnet's cage had icicles around it, in lieu of the lime or the lilac bough that had used to hang above it. Mère Rose was dead ; and the linnet was dead also. The casements of the coffee-house were closed against the sharpness of the cold ; there were no music in the streets, no laugh on the crisp air, for the populace of this quarter were exceeding poor, and suffered greatly in the winter-time ; across the road at the window where the grisette had been wont to sit, sewing her rose-coloured skirt for a students' ball, the shutters were fastened, the

owners of the dwelling were gone to prison for debts that they owed for bread and vegetables.

Though it was the first morning of a new year, there were no mirth, no gaiety, no greetings, little movement, in the passage way: there were only a ragged child raking in the snow for bits of offal, and a fat pampered cat, the savage pet of a butcher, watching to seize a bird, whose half-frozen heavily-weighted wings dragged it slowly through the descending snow.

Tricotrin stood at his garret lattice, and looked down awhile upon the desolation. It was the day of the city's uttermost rejoicing; but there was no rejoicing here.

Even the elastic mirth of the national temper was killed under the cold, and the hunger, that came with a season of almost unexampled severity.

Like the attic of Teufelsdröckh 'in the highest house of the Wahngasse,' it was his watch-tower whence he 'could behold all the life circulation of the city.' With Teufelsdröckh he could say, 'I look down into that wasp nest, or bee hive, and witness their wax-laying, and honey-making, and poison brewing, and choking by sulphur. From the palace esplanade where music plays while serene highness is pleased to eat his victuals, down the low lane, where in her door-sill the aged widow, knitting for a thin livelihood, sits to feel the afternoon sun, I see it all.'

Saw it—with that far-reaching, clear, penetrative vision which belongs only to that mind which men, for want of a better name, have called the poet's ; which by the infinitude of sympathy attains to the infinitude of comprehension ; which understands all, because it feels all things ; and which withholds the largeness of its justice, and the insight of its tenderness, as little from the palace as from the hovel, from the throes of ambition as from the travail of poverty.

He looked out, from his attic-window, upon the snowy morning :—the ragged child fled away with a scream as an old tin pot was flung at his head from a doorway near, with a shower of curses : the cat pounced on the frozen fluttering bird, that gave its life up with scarcely an effort at resistance.

A little way farther on the child, having been punished whilst innocent, deemed it as well to be guilty, and snatched a roll from the baker's stall unperceived, and darted out of sight with his theft ; the cat, having been successful in killing her prey, choked herself with the broken bones and bloody feathers, yet beat off with tooth and talon a weakly kitten that crept timidly near her for the scraps of ruffled plumage that were left.

'So the year begins !' he thought, 'with two fables set in motion,—the famine that is turned to guilt by unjust punishment, the greed that success makes savage and venomous. Between them they

make up the world ! And here, one pities the lad, one is enraged with the cat, but neither our pity nor our rage will make up the lost loaf to the baker, or the lost life to the bird. There is the toughest puzzle of the problem. Neither our compassion nor our anger are of much use after all.'

The half-entangled metaphorical fancies drifted idly through his brain, as the baker discovered his missing roll with outcries and lamentations, and the cat dealt its feeble fellow a final stroke that sent it shrieking into a cellar.

Thus the year commenced on the chill, bleak, biting morning of its first day.

He turned from the lattice as a small, pale, black-eyed maiden brought him his coffee and roll. He gave her a little piece of silver.

'Here, Flôre—take that to your friend, René, over the way. Tell him I saw a lad run off with one of his loaves just this moment; and I know he can ill afford to lose it with wheat at the price it is, and his two old people to keep, all the winter through.'

The girl nodded, and went off, willingly and with a bright laugh: the baker was a favourite with her, a good-hearted laborious youth from the Cévennes, who had hard work to maintain, singlehanded, two helpless aged women, one blind, the other paralyzed, his mother and grandmother, who, if ever his bread-shop should be closed, would be turned out upon public charity. René loved the black eyes of the

little Flôre right well: but there was no chance that he could marry her, whilst those two old women should sit on either side of his stove, needing all the warmth its scanty fuel could yield. He got no gratitude and no thanks for it: the two women muttered and crooned against him, day and night, because the room was so small, the tiled floor so cold, the coffee so rough, the sugar so scanty, the bread so stale, the soup so flavourless: but he went on uncomplainingly with the execution of his duty to them, in that almost unconscious self-sacrifice which is one of the best and purest things found under the 'sulphur-chokings' of the lives of the poor.

When the girl was gone, Tricotrin broke off a great piece of his own roll, and scattered it in crumbs upon his window-sill, and on the stone ledge that ran beneath it: the robins and the sparrows soon fluttered to the feast.

'There!' he said to Mistigri, with a laugh. 'Do you see, little one? That is just about the measure of all we social philosophers ever contribute to the redressing of the world's wrong-doings—save one starving songster out of a million, and amend one theft out of ten thousand millions! A fine thing to crow over and be proud of, truly! Perhaps the cat is the wiser moralist of all of us, after all,—“I am fat, I have talons, I can be cunning and strong at once, and therefore I can be successful,” she says. “Why should a little

wretched bird, half dead already, with drenched wings, and maw empty of food, not perish to give me a succulent morsel?" That is the cat's argument: it is the argument of the *tyrannis* everywhere. And the birds, somehow or other, always leave the safety of their high roof-tops, and their ambient air, to come down where the cat sits; because, though within reach of her claws, they thus get warmth, and crumbs, and wool for their nests, where she is. And so the nations ever leave their liberties, and their simplicities, and their hardy freedoms, and the roof-tops of their republics if by chance they have ever flown so far, to cluster round some fierce *tyrannis*, subtle and strong in one; because, though they are pecked and slain by talon and fang to sate insatiate greed, they find food easier to be got, and the wherewithal to line their nests more abundant, where a despot feeds his mob into a proletariat, than where there were only the freedom of the air and the elevation of the mountain-tops. The cat kills, ay; but each foolish bird deems that he, himself, will have the good luck to escape her, and each comes down to fatten on the refuse she has left on her plate as a lure for him. There is always the cat for the sparrow—the *tyrannis* for the republic,—that once has learnt to covet!

And with that piece of political apologue to Mistigri, he gave her a cup of hot milk from which she drank with dainty lady's ways, and which she

enjoyed more than she did the political moralizing, and betook himself to his own breakfast.

It was noon ; and he had long before given his new-year greeting to the household, and tendered and received the simple gifts which, in this quarter, carried alike a pleasure, and a sincerity, unknown where gold went by handsfull to the buying of treasures made worthless and wearisome by hackneyed custom.

There was one gift that had made his own heart quicken with a throb of rejoicing.

It had come to him late on the previous night, brought by the hands of a sturdy youth of the shores of Finisterre, who had wandered, in self-will, and on the spur of a young man's vague ambitious and discontent, up to the great city ; with some such seething impatience and aspiration in his soul as were once in the lion-heart of the farmer's son from Arcis-sur-Aube. It stood now above the stove, in the lofty whitewashed barren garret, wherein the Greek Canaris had once been fed and succoured, and the Waif of the Loire had once dreamed her dreams over her roasting chestnuts. It was the model of a ship, cut out of oak that was dark as ebony from long burial beneath sea water : it had been carved with exceeding skill and patience, with no better instruments than a rude clasp-knife and an oyster-shell ground to a fine edge ; and had been polished with the sands of the



shore till it shone like black marble, where it stood against the whitewashed wall.

On it was cut :

‘ Rioz to Tricotrin.’

It had been the work of several long winters, shaped to the measure of the beating sea, fashioned to the dies iræ of the storm wind.

To every other eye it was a toy, something clumsily made, perchance, as by a fisherman’s rough hands and ill-suited tools ; the mere model in old wreck-wood of a fishing-smack. But to him it bore a story of a life redeemed, of a life conquered, of a life saved from the hell of its own passions by justice and by patience—a story of self-conquest as great, of self-denial as strong, of travail with temptation as bitter, of expiation in pain as long-enduring, as were ever symbolized by the white crucifix above cathedral altars.

It had come far to him ; come from that iron-bound, furious, terrific coast upon the western waters, where he had dwelt for three years asunder from the world, and away from all its beauty and its joy, that he might drag one human life from the blackness of its guilt as he would have dragged it from the seizure of the waves.

It had come far to him from that old Armorican shore ; and it had moved him strangely ; speaking to him with a voice that he alone could hear.

‘ Chut, Mistigri,’ he said softly, as his eyes fell on

it where he sat. 'I was wrong to say there are only the cat and the sparrows, only the tyrannis and the proletariat;—are there not ever, if we will only look for them, some battle to be fought, some patience to be needed, some vileness to be wrestled with, some greatness to be rescued? Bah, little one! If we only all remembered that, and occupied ourselves with that, we should be doing more good than by raving about the cat's talons, and blaming the sparrows for not living on hill-tops like eagles!'

Mistigri finished her milk, inattentive to his discourse; in her secret heart she sympathized much with the cats, little with the sparrows, not at all with the eagles. Mistigri had been reared in the atmosphere of republicanism; like many democrats by education she only really admired the 'tyrannis,' and had she lived in the days of Dictatorship, would have sat upon Sulla's shoulder.

Tricotrin rose, put on his loose coat of furs, thrust her gently into its breast pocket, and went out into the snow.

The kitten which had been driven away had returned, and having eaten up the blood-flecked feathers had set itself to watch upon its own account.

'There!' murmured Tricotrin to the monkey. 'You see that is always the way—it is never the *tyrannis* that is the sole evil; there are always the blood-suckers that seize what the chief talon has

spared, there are always the followers and imitators who multiply one evil into a hundred. The hill-tops are cold, my good friend sparrows, but believe me they are far better.'

The proletarian sparrows, however, disregarded him, and continued to put themselves within the cats' reach, for sake of the crumbs of food left on the platter, as he turned out of the passage-way and took his road to cross the river into the aristocratic quarters of Paris.

These were thronged, busy, mirthful, glittering, with the gay crowds of holiday-makers and gift-buyers; he paid no heed to anything he saw upon the way, not loitering as his habit was for jest, or act, or indolent amusement with the humorous of the town, but pressing straight onward into the patrician parts he sought.

His eyes were eager, anxious, clouded, sunlit, all at once: like the eyes of one who goes to what is half anguish and half ecstasy.

He paused at length before the massive metal gates of a great court.

In years long gone by, when, in scorching mid-summer weather, the blood of men had been heated to fever-heat, and broken into sanguinary act as over-ripe grass breaks into flame, a great mob had beaten in with maddened blows those strong-wrought brazen gates, and forced themselves into the court within, and spread over it like a flood, and sworn to

sack and burn all that they beheld. And they had been driven back by him, scourged with his scornful rebuke as with the stripes of a whip, as he saved the Lirà Palace from destruction.

Now he went thither—doubtful how he should gain admittance through the flippant, idle, insolent herd of lackeys and of pages that lounged through their indolent days in its halls and corridors.

‘Your Duchess is visible?’ he asked of them, as crossing the great court he entered the first hall, lofty, vaulted, all of white marble, with only touches of dead gold and of deep purple to break its purity and vastness.

‘She is come from Spain; but she will not be likely to receive you!’ said one of the group of pages, with sneering impudence, glancing at the newcomer, whom he recognized as a mad bohemian, whom the people cherished, but who was never seen anywhere save in hovels and wine-shops, and thieves’ haunts, and artists’ attics.

‘That question is not for you to ask or to decide,’ said Tricotrin, tranquilly. ‘Go—and tell your mistress that I am here.’

‘And who may “I” be?’ scoffed the page, incensed at the tone and at the words.

‘Tricotrin,’ he answered simply. ‘Play no longer with phrases; do your errand, and bring me word what her pleasure is.’

The page loitered, sorely inclined to test the patience of his adversary under insolence and torment : but something fearful of such self-indulgence, sent the message through other servants to her chamberlain, who took it sullenly, not without reluctance and wonder ; though he was aware that the new-comer had been held in high esteem by his late master, and had done him some great service in days of revolution.

The chamberlain passed through several chambers, picture-cabinets, and reception-rooms, and entered at length an apartment looking on the gardens at the back of the Hôtel : an octagon, all azure, and silver, and tempered light, and delicate fragrance, with walls after Boucher, and the laughing Hours imitated from Coreggio dancing in a joyous band around the ceiling.

Sunk among cushions was the most lovely woman of her time, and of her court. The fire-gleams flashed on the silk folds of skirts, whose negligence was the supreme perfection of art : her fair hands glowed with rings ; and as she glanced at a book that lay upon her lap, she toyed with a Polichinelle, whose bells were of gold, whose tambourine was circled with pearls, and who had cost that morning seven hundred francs.

Around her were strewn jewel caskets, bonbon-boxes, bouquets, playthings, marvellous in ingenuity and extravagance, fans of every make and of incon-

ceivable costliness, all that fancy could fashion, and riches be wasted on ; as though every shop in Paris had been emptied there, in the lavishness of the new-year offerings. And at a third of them she had not looked !

There is a wild and wayward destiny in life which ever loads fruition with satiety.

Lost in languid, sunny, victorious musing, she did not hear her servant's entrance until he had approached her, and spoken the few words of the message with hesitating deference, and scarcely concealed expectancy of a refusal.

She started slightly, and over her face swept for a moment a shadow of annoyance, mingled with another feeling that her astute attendant could not analyze. Both were instantly banished ; she answered with tranquil indifference,

‘Certainly. Admit him here.’

Her chamberlain backed out from her presence, filled with a curiosity that he dared not utter. A few minutes went by, then into her chamber was ushered, —one, who to her conscience, her memory, and her life, was a Reproach.

He bent his head before her, and stood still, without advancing, whilst the attendants closed the door behind him.

She, with a flush over the fairness of her brow, rose with her hands outstretched, her rich silks and laces trailing round her, her loveliness shrined in

the dazzling heaps of her strewn new-year gifts. Her first impulse was of proud shameful pain; her next of conscience-stricken and awakening loyalty.

He shaded his eyes one moment with his hand with the gesture of one whom the sun blinds, then came to her and took her own hands in his in silence. There was no one near to witness how a bohemian was received by a great lady.

‘Viva!’—that was all he said; but in the single word was a caress and a benediction beyond all that longer utterance could have given.

She, a proud and splendid woman, in the plenitude of power, and the dauntlessness of empire, shrank slightly as she heard it; it was fraught with all that she would have buried in oblivion for ever, it recalled all that galled, and fretted, and embittered her cloudless and haughty life. With that word came back to her all the shame she burned to ignore and forget, as though it had never been; it brought with it all the echoes of that early and innocent affection to which she had so long been faithless and disloyal.

She was cold, while she knew coldness so base; she was restless under his gaze, though she knew that so much love looked on her in it; she was stung with impatience and with false pride, though she knew that in him she saw the saviour of her existence.

It had been years since she had beheld him, and in those years the power of the world and the poison of vanity had eaten far into the purer gold of her nature.

‘It is so long since I have seen you!’ she murmured, as she drew her hands from his hold gently, and sank amongst the cushions of her couch, turning her eyes upon him.

‘Nay,—not longer than is best,’ he answered her, with a tremour in his voice. ‘You had seen me oftener had you missed the sight of me. But that was not probable; not possible.’

She hurriedly began to utter the denial that courtesy compelled and gratitude required.

He stopped her with a gesture, slight, but of authority.

‘Hush! No disclaimer against truth out of courtesy to me. Think you I cease to know your heart better than you know it yourself? You forgot me; it was natural, inevitable. Why not?—why not?’

There was an unconscious pathos and wistfulness in his accent; as though, against himself and his rights which arraigned her, he pleaded excuse for the negligence and the ingratitude of the one who owed him her rescue from the grave.

Her eyelids fell; her forehead flushed; the imperial coquette felt humbled in her own sight.

‘You deem me very base,’ she murmured.

'Base? No. Only,—a woman! Long ago did I not tell thee how it would be with me and thee? I knew the world's work. Thou didst not,—then. But *I* do not blame thee, Viva.'

His phrase had changed insensibly into the familiar 'thou'; and his eyes, as they dwelt upon her, had the yearning love of lover, husband, father, poet, all blended in one passion,—a passion mighty as death, and which would live and die, holding eternal silence.

Her cheeks burned as she heard, she breathed quickly with agitation: at the sound of his voice the old, warm, reverent tenderness stirred from its embers in her heart; and yet,—it seemed so hard that one should live who knew what she had been, it seemed so bitter that one should look on her who could remember her the child of charity!

He watched her, reading well her thoughts; and gazing at the marvellous change wrought in her; at the perfection, as of some superb tropical flower, to which her early promise had expanded, at the magic whereby the fair child that he had known had altered into this magnificent patrician.

A young girl, lovely as a poet's ideal of Gretchen, had been crowned by the river-side queen of the vintage-feast: but a woman superb as a sculptor's dream of Aspasia, was before him now. He gazed at her long, then turned away as with a sudden unbearable pang.

‘Good God ! How changed you are !’

She smiled, a dreamy, haughty, careless smile. She knew it well, and was proud of the change that to him was so bitter. Yet something in the phrase jarred on her : she had so long tried to forget that she had ever been otherwise than what she was now, that the trial had brought success with herself, and self-persuasion had almost induced self-deception.

And she did not heed, or did not even divine, the anguish that change bore for him.

It was never betrayed. She knew well that he loved her : but she never dreamed how he loved her. It was a martyrdom, without even the reward of recognition.

‘I could scarcely be otherwise than changed,’ she answered him musingly. ‘Do you know—do you know—it seems scarcely possible to me that I could ever have been the child *you* knew and succoured ?’

‘Does it ?’ he replied, gently ; for he never lost gentleness to her, however deeply she might wound him. ‘That is very natural, I dare say. Yes : it is inevitable you should be changed ; and in much more than mere form. You have a lofty station, Viva ?’

‘Yes,’—her delicate brows contracted ; the Duchess de Lirà, whom none ever addressed save by titles of dignity and reverence, could have wished that familiar pet name of her childhood, that relic of her foundling’s estate, dropped out for ever into oblivion.

‘You have the whole of the Lirà properties?’ he asked.

‘I have. He had not a living relative. He could will them where he would.’

‘His was a great nature—a noble nature.’

‘He was most generous,—yes.’

‘Did he suffer much?’

‘Not much—I trust. He died in my absence; but calmly, and painlessly, they assured me.’

‘You regretted him?’

The colour flushed her face again.

‘Not so much as I ought; I knew that well at the time. I regretted his mother’s death far more. I grew to love her well, and she loved me—’

‘But so did he—God knows!’

‘Ah, yes!—far more than I merited, you would say. That I am sure. But one cannot love merely *because* one is loved, you know? He was most good, most gentle, most thoughtful for me, and I owed him very much; but—’

‘He was nothing to you! No; you have had too much tenderness in your life to know its worth. You are surfeited with it, and it is valueless. Had you had but a few crumbs instead of such abundant banquets, you would feel very differently. Bread is tasteless to the rich man; but bread to the poor man is as the apples of paradise. He was aware that you cared nothing for him?’

‘He must have been so. I never used dissimula-

tion. They made me very happy, and I liked them—thus; but I never professed attachment I did not feel. Besides—I have no belief in that idyllic folly they call “love!”’

‘You have not?’—she had no belief in love, while over her life watched a love exhaustless, unrepaid, purified to sublimity, and free from one murmur of reproach against her!

She looked quickly up at him.

‘Of what are you thinking?’

‘Shall I tell you?’

‘Surely.’

‘Well—I thought that the foundling, who was mine, would have flung back, as disgrace and insult, the bribe of a silver coin that should have been offered her to purchase a single kiss from her lips. But the aristocrat, with whose life I have nothing to do, had so little of that true pride left, that she saw no shame in bartering for gold and rank all her youth, all her beauty, all her soul!’

The simplicity of the words had a grand rebuke, a rebuke that stung her keenly. She had enough still in her of the temper which had made her loathe her young lover’s golden toys, to make her now feel every barb of the censure to the quick.

‘You blame me because I married!’ she murmured, with an impatient irritation.

‘Because you married without love. The woman

who does so sells herself as utterly as, and little less basely than, the courtesan.'

She gave a languid gesture of offence. Truth lay in his words; and unwelcome truth, with its severity and its nakedness, was an outrage that never approached her graceful presence.

'You speak strongly on a singular subject,' she answered, coldly. 'I am not accustomed to such language. I view marriage as the world, I believe, views it; and at the time of my own you were informed of it, and you offered no objections—'

'I bade you do as you desired. It was not for me to stand between you and the magnificence you coveted and could obtain. You knew what I thought, full well. But I have not come hither to upbraid you for that which is past. I pitied the man who spent his whole soul on you, and bought your loveliness through his wealth, and found that, squander what he would, he could not buy one throb of tenderness, one pulse of warmth! I pitied him from my heart—'

'Others envied him!'

There were all the insolence of supreme vanity, all the sovereignty of supreme triumph, in the accent with which the brief phrase was uttered.

'They might do so. I was not amongst them,' he answered, gravely. 'He purchased a bird without a song, a rose without fragrance, a sun without

warmth. For—he bought your beauty without a soul! And you left him to die in your absence!’

Her white, delicate teeth bit the lower lip of her bow-like mouth. She moved impatiently, contemptuously. She,—whom none ever crossed or contradicted in her slightest whim or caprice,—to be arraigned and censured by a wanderer, a bohemian, an outcast! For thus in her thoughts she classed now the redeemer of her life.

‘You are angered because I say this thing,’ he pursued. ‘I will say more. You chose to wed with him because he was noble, he was of great riches, he could give you a lofty station—’

‘Who else would have done so?’ she interrupted him passionately. ‘You forget! I had no name, no parentage; though means were found to hide this, and give me, in semblance, a foreign origin; there was not another of such rank as his that could have wedded one under such social ban as mine without exposure of it; there was not another who could have concealed the truth from the world as he could, nor from whom it could have been withheld.’

‘No; and therefore for that cause you sold yourself to him. I repeat the word that galls you so greatly. But it is precisely because this man loved you so tenderly, so generously, so patiently, that your sin against him was so dark. You took all, and repaid him nothing in the only coin you had to give; and when he died you were only—in your

heart—content to be so soon left free, to be so soon unchained to enjoy all the possessions that he gave without the burden on them of their giver's life.'

She was silent; but the hand which had let fall the Polichinelle beat impatiently on the mosaic table beside her couch, and a shadow of vehement offence, mingled with something of repentance and of consciousness, darkened her fair and serene face. She knew that he read her soul with all his olden accuracy; she knew that he spoke what was but the simple truth.

She glanced at him, and felt steal on her the wonder which, since she had known the world, had often come across her mind, as to whence arose that strange and strong unlikeness betwixt his fortunes and his bearing.

She—grown keenly critical, scornfully indifferent, and very difficult to impress—was struck as she had never been with the authority, the dignity, the kingliness of his manner, the pure accent of his voice, the careless grace of his movements. In her early years this question had never occurred to her. She had had no standard with which to compare him: now she wondered, in this first moment of his entrance to her, 'whence he came, how he had become what he was, this man who was without grade and without home, who lived amongst the peasantry, the populace, the fisher-people, who was an itinerant and a socialist, yet who had about him

a command monarchs might have envied, and a beauty that painters might have given to an Agamemnon.

Once, when she had still been his, the story of his life had been upon his lips to tell her. The impulse had been repressed, the tale remained untold for ever.

‘Why did you never come to me whilst my husband lived?’ she asked him suddenly.

Now and again she had seen him; seen him as he sold the Italian boy’s images to the populace, as he stood outside the gates of the Tuileries that she quitted, as she rode through a German pine-forest, as she drove through a Lombardic city, as she watched the Roman Carnival from her balcony, as she glided over the ice of Neva to the music of her silver sleigh-bells. She had seen him often—ever with a strange flush, a strange pang, a strange emotion of mingled sorrow and delight, tenderness and shame. But from the time that he had heard of her marriage, he had never approached her.

The unloved lord, who, heaping all his treasures on her, yet could not win one soft thought from her, divined through sympathy the reason of this absence. She never did. So little did she comprehend his motive, that she, in all her eminence, in all her brilliancy, felt oftentimes a pained and passionate anger that this man, whom still in her soul she loved as she had loved no other living creature,

should thus withhold himself from witnessing her glories.

‘Why did you never come?’ she repeated, with imperious persistency. ‘The Duke held you in warm esteem, in high honour,—you know that!’

‘I do not think my absence lessened either his esteem or his honour. I never came to you because—because—no matter why! I acted as I deemed best. You need not question that.’

She was stilled and vaguely disquieted by the reply. Even yet, despite the lapse of years, he possessed an influence over her that no other had ever attained.

‘You lead a brilliant life?’ he pursued, desirous to turn aside from the subject on which she pressed him.

‘I lead the customary life of my station:—’

She hesitated a moment; the thought crossed her mind, could not she pay by Power the debt that Gratitude had left unpaid? Was there no benefit possible from her high position and vast influence that might strike the balance between them, and do something to lessen that weight of obligation which it so galled her proud throat to bear?

But the mere thought looked insult to him. She did not dare to utter it aloud.

‘I saw something of the fashion in which you seek to make the hours fly, down at your castle in the south,’ he continued. ‘I arrived there too late

to have an interview with you there. You were gone to the royal marriage in Spain; but I heard much of you on your estate, much of the magnificence of your hospitalities—'

She turned her head with that smile wherewith she was accustomed to deal as she chose with the souls of men.

'Do not be content with hearsay of them. Let them be shown to, and tested by, yourself. That will give me far more pleasure.'

It was a courtly, graceful, elegant utterance; but it struck cold as ice to his heart. There was no warmth in it; there was only the polished suavity of conventional courtesy.

'I have never sat at any gold-laden table. I shall not commence with yours,' he said curtly. 'Why let us deal in this hypocrisy? You know as well as I,—I as well as you,—that it would only be irritation and ignominy to you to see me among your guests. You could not account for me: you would have to present me as "Tricotrin, the bohemian," you would be compelled to admit that I had no friends except the People,—no, I know your nature far too well, and that of the world you live in, to impose any such penalty and penance upon you. You see—I can have some sympathy with the class to which you belong—I can even sympathize with its false shame!'

The contemptuous bitterness of his answer stung

the latent truth in her into life ; she was pained by it, and the natural frankness of her temper broke into speech.

‘ Ah ! ’ she said, with involuntary self-scorn, ‘ there you do *them* wrong, not me. If I had been born and reared in their rank I should not know that “ false shame.” The Order never has it : it is far too proud of itself. An hereditary prince may shake hands with a beggar, he cannot lose his rank thereby : it is the new-comer into honours and splendours who dares not imperil his fresh titles by touching the beggar, lest the world cry, “ see—he runs to his brother ! ” ’

He looked at her earnestly.

‘ You have the acuteness and the sarcasm in you to see this,’ he said, ‘ and yet— ! ’

‘ And yet I am no better than what I satirize ! Is that an uncommon fault in your Juvenals and Voltaires and Swifts ? So—you heard of me in the south. What do my people say ? ’

And despite the momentary self-dissection in which she had lashed herself scornfully as an alien, and adventuress, in the great order to which she now belonged, there were all the royalty of possession, all the negligence of command, in the intonation of those words, ‘ my people.’ In such a tone might Maria Theresa have spoken !

‘ “ Your people ? ” ’ he echoed, with a certain ironic disdain that cut her pride hardly. ‘ Well, they

talk of your splendid entertainments, you do not give them much else to talk of, I believe, except it be of the extortions and oppressions of your stewards.'

'Extortions! Oppressions! I never heard of any.'

'Doubtless. How should you hear? If a wood-cutter or a charcoal-burner, grimy, starved, and half-clad, found his way on to your terraces to accuse your great servants of peculations and tyrannies, which would he be likeliest to get—a blow from a lackey's wand if he did not shuffle away quickly enough, or a polite ushering in to your audience chamber?'

She smiled a little, but vexatiously.

'Well! Would you have my rooms thronged all day with a mob of foresters and burrowers in the earth?'

'There is a time for all things. There can be hours set apart for such hearings. It is just that barring out of the unjustly-oppressed from the audience-room, when they are only armed with an appeal, that brings, sooner or later, the clamorous mob, armed with clubs and pikes, into the banquetting-hall. It is not the nobles' fault, it is the fault of their hirelings: for none are so brutal to the poor as those who have once been of them. You have the same stewards that the Duke de Lirà employed, I suppose?'

She coloured a little.

‘Not in the south. The person he had left in office there opposed my will in one or two matters : one does not pay servants to have them dispute, discuss, advise, and finally disobey. I discharged him ; and obtained one who knew his place better.’

‘Who gives you lip-service and the form of obedience that lies in servility ; and makes your name hated throughout your estates, by wringing subsidies from the poverty-stricken for his own private purse : yes—I dare say that is knowing his place better ! as modern enlightenment goes. But—despite your sanction of his reign—I shall be glad if you will take some pity on an old truffle-hunter in your woods. He is very old, and lame ; can live only a few years at most ; and having dwelt on the Lirà estates from his birth upward, may claim to have the trouble of keeping his body and soul together made somewhat easier to him. Besides, he has a piteous story.’

‘Assuredly. I will direct them to see that he wants for nothing. Will you give me his name ?’

‘It is Aubin Ralcor.’

She noted it down on the little ivory tablet hanging by its gold chain at her side. She did not ask the old man’s history, so he left it unrelated. He felt that the memory of Coriolis must still be painful and unwelcome to her.

‘You know, I have been but little in our own country,’ she pursued, as though in apology for her

ignorance of the necessities of the poor upon her lands. 'We were occasionally in Paris, but far oftener abroad. The year after the Duke's death I passed in retirement in my villa upon Como. The only season I have been at the castle I have been surrounded, for a few weeks only, with a circle of guests that left me little time for thought. This summer I entertained the King of—but you know all these things?'

She broke off somewhat hastily with a sense of anger that nothing in her dignities, or in her achievements, could move him to surprise at, or to veneration of, them.

'Yes,' he answered her. 'There is nothing in your life I do not know.'

'But how? I have met you so rarely.'

'That may easily be. You would probably have discerned me, had your thoughts been of me. Any how I have watched you—many times. But I do not want to talk of myself; here is your oldest friend whom you have not yet seen.'

She started as the monkey sprang forth from where it had slumbered in his pocket: the sight of the little animal recalled so many memories in such vivid intensity.

She covered her eyes with her hand for awhile, and breathed rapidly and with emotion. She was once more a child on the banks of the sunny Loire: she saw once more the innocent and lowly home

from which she had gone without one backward glance of gratitude or of regret. She was moved more keenly than she had been for many years.

But her life had taught her to conquer and conceal all agitation; she was quick to recover her habitual calm and negligence.

She stretched out her jewelled hands full of sweetmeats from the new-year boxes.

‘Ah, little Mistigri! She is still alive! How old she must be by now! Mistigri, will you not eat my sugared almonds?’

Mistigri was either shy or cross: she would not be cajoled into touching one of the dainty, pretty, coloured crystals of sugar: she did not recognize her old playmate, for whose rescue she had once voted with her filbert, in this brilliant aristocrat who held her out these bonbons.

‘Mistigri does not know you,’ he said quietly, stroking the little black averted head. ‘Well! the world of Paris has emptied itself upon you in your new-year gifts. And what pleasure do they give you, all these jewelled cases, all these splendid trifles?’

She smiled: the smile that in his eyes had no light.

‘Pleasure! Do you think me a child still to take pleasure in those bagatelles; they are only custom.’

‘Ah! And yet to have such things of custom,

or the like, men will barter their honesty and women their honour! That is droll! Which is the richer? he who has little but enjoys all, or he who has much but with all is sated? A few years since how your heart panted for such "bagatelles." Yet, then, a wreath of river lilies, a leaf full of wild strawberries, made you glad. Which was the richer? Your present or your past?

'Which! How strange a question! There can be little doubt, I imagine. Though I have lost a child's love for new-year presents, there are many—'

'Costlier toys? Men's love, and peace, and honour? Yes: there are, for women such as you. But, Duchess Viva, once you broke and trod upon a grape garland, and when you had destroyed it wept vain tears over the bruised leaves. Take heed you never do so with a life.'

'The poor grape garland!' she said, with a careless low laugh, avoiding the rest of his speech. 'I remember it and my foolish passion too; but it reminds me,—to ask you;—the dear old woman;—"Grand'mère,"—is she well?'

'Yes. She is well,' he answered gravely.

'She has always had my money?—my presents?' she asked hurriedly, a hot blush coming and going on her face.

'Yes: she received them.'

'And was pleased with them? I sent them

regularly, but she could not write to tell me whether she liked them.'

'You remember the walnut press in her little bed-room?'

'I think I do—yes?'

'Well—in it lie all your gold and all your gifts. She would not pain you by returning them: but neither would she use alms from one who for so many years has never cared to look upon her face. You have yet to learn that money cannot heal a wound that negligence has dealt; and that there are some debts which cannot be repaid in coin.'

The colour deepened in her face, conscience in her warred with irritated pride.

'That is absurd!' she murmured. 'I never forgot to supply her with what she needed—'

'She needed nothing; except the one thing you never gave her.'

'I should have gone to see her,' she said rapidly, with an unconscious accent of apology and self-excuse. 'But—so many things engaged me; at first I was so entirely under their rule, and latterly I have been abroad so very much. I will go down and visit her soon; as soon as the days are somewhat brighter.'

'You have said that long: and—she has over ninety years. The spring does not always bring new life to the old and leafless trees.'

She was silent : he stirred her heart but he did not move her pride.

He took up the Polichinelle, true to his habits of saying no useless words ; and he was reluctant to seek for the brave old woman the remembrance that was not instinctive and born of gratitude.

‘ My old friend Punchinello ? ’ he said,—‘ all jewelled and gold-laden too : well, puppets as empty, and less harmless and mirth-giving, than he, have eaten up the nation’s gold often ere now. A handsome puppet, moreover, which all crowned marionettes are not.’

‘ I bought it for a little Russian prince,—the son of great friends of mine.’

‘ Ah ! And it cost ? ’

‘ Seven hundred francs.’

Tricotrin shook the toy lightly till the little turquoise-studded bells rang a chime.

‘ So, Punch !—you lie in a silk and eider-down box, and cost seven hundred francs. Fie, fie ! Why you are almost as costly and useless as a king !—you too, who have made fun for the people everywhere, ever since the days of Rome. Punch—the Russian boy will break you in ten minutes ; and outside the gates yonder I met a girl, once your mistress’s playmate, Edmée Roxal, whose son lies dead in her arms, because she had not money to buy him a loaf. Contrasts are sharp in this world, Punch !—and the populace that you have wagged your head for

through so many generations, has always got steel, or shot, if it ventured to find that out, and object to it, once in a while.'

She looked up; and shook hurriedly out a shower of gold from her purse.

'Edmée Roxal?—her child dead of want? How fearful! Give her these!'

He put them gently back.

'No. They are not wanted now. Money will not buy back from King Death. And—for Edmée herself; she lies in hospital, delirious, clenching the stiffened limbs of the infant to her breast. Neither you nor Polichinelle can help that: only—when you give so much for him and his kind,—think of these things, and of your safe haven from them!'

'But we never do think of these things!'

There were carelessness, regret, impatience, apology, all in the words: she, beautiful, luxurious, adored, had wholly ceased to remember that a time had been when 'these things' would have been her portion also, in all their cruelty and nakedness, had not his hand been stretched to rescue her.

'True,' he said, simply, 'you never do.'

To him it was not possible to recall that time to her; since, to awaken her soul to gratitude for the mercies of her fate, he must also have called on gratitude for himself.

'But when this girl—Edmée—is well again, let me give her all that can comfort her?—give it

through you?' she said quickly. 'You will say nothing of who I am—'

'I promised you silence long ago. I never justified you in supposing that my promises were given to be broken.'

There was a sternness in the answer that moved her with a certain sense that was almost as of fear: the greatness, the singularity, the mysteries of this life that had so long been interwoven with her own, bewildered her: she could not comprehend them.

He rose; and stood before her, gazing at her with a look under which her eyes sank. Little by little she had been drawn away from him, till between them scarcely a bond remained. The thought crossed him—would he after all have been so selfishly in error, so blind through the mists of passion, if he had kept her, through her ignorance, in his own hands, under his own law and love? Would he not have made her happiness purer, her life truer, her future safer, because nearer God, than they now were; brilliant, imperious, pampered, exquisite creature though she was? She was great, she was lovely, she was content, she was unrivalled; but where was that 'divine nature' wherewith he had once believed her dowered.

'Where are your thoughts now?' she asked him once again; restless beneath that fixed and melancholy regard which she could not meet.

A sigh escaped him as he answered,—

‘Pondering whether the Duchess de Lirà, great in all magnificence though she be, may not, after all, be poorer than was the child Viva, happy in the simple wealth of the honey, and the chestnuts, and the violets from the woods!’

‘I could wish you could permit me to forget that such a child ever lived!’

The impatient and cruel words were uttered, heedless how they struck him, in a moment of haughty wrath that this obscure and nameless Past could be quoted against her, that in her path of roses this one thorn should be still beneath her feet. She had ever clung passionately to the belief of some mighty origin having given her birth: for the last years she had shut out from her own sight the remembrance that she had ever been other than she now was. She spoke on the spur of pride, selfishness, offended dignity: she did not feel the baseness and the cowardice of her utterance.

His mouth quivered under the fulness of its snowy silken beard.

‘Have I seemed to remind you of it? Forgive me. There is nothing for *you* to remember;—farewell.’

He bowed his head; and laid down upon her hands a cluster of white and purple violets; lovelier amid the darkness of their broad round leaves, than

all the jewelled trifles of art and fashion strewn about her.

‘Others give you gold and diamonds,’ he said wearily. ‘I have nothing but these. Only,—remember for once enough of your childhood to take them from me as I give.’

He turned quickly from her to spare himself and her all need of answer ; but the love which had once lived so strongly in her heart was not wholly petrified into death, the nature which had been so long attuned to his, could not but vibrate in some measure to his touch.

She rose swiftly ; the look of bygone years in her eyes, the accent of bygone years in her voice. She stretched her hands out to him with all the sweet and contrite grace of her early penitence and supplication.

‘Oh ! do not think me so vile as I make myself seem ! I have not forgotten ; I never forget in my heart. It is the world that makes me sin against you ; the coldest, vainest, basest, weakest part of me. I know how cold, how false, how guilty I must seem to you ; and I have been so ! But these flowers are dearer to me than all their jewels, and for my crimes to you I hate myself. To meet you thus,—to be severed from you thus,—to live as though I owed you nothing,—as though I had forgotten your matchless goodness, your infinite mercy,—I think that I must be the guiltiest thing on earth !’

All the ingenuous contrition, all the wayward inconsistencies, all the native tenderness, all the warm and sudden self-reproach, which had been characteristic of her childhood were on her now, shattering down the pride of an imperious egotism. For the moment she forgot all that had divorced them, for the moment she was to him all that she once had been. For that moment an ecstasy glistened in his eyes,—to die the next.

He took her outstretched hands, and touched them once, lightly, with his lips :

‘ You have no sins to *me*. And—if you had, did I not long since promise you pardon ? Your better nature is not dead in you ; cherish it still, it will be greater riches to you than your gold.’

And then, he turned and left her.

With the violets lying in her lap she sat long, motionless, and alone.

‘ Have I deserved to be what I am ? ’ she questioned, the rare voice of remorse speaking in her soul. She knew only too well that she had not.

Yonder, in the vine-country, in the little river-house, the woman who had nurtured and fostered her in her infancy was left to loneliness, and sorrow, and old age, unsolaced.

Across the Alps, in the City of the Dead, was the solitary mausoleum of the husband to whom she owed every renown, pleasure, and glory, that now illumined her life, and whose vast, mute, boundless

love had served her in tenderness and in humility, unrecompensed even by a caress as fond as that she gave her dogs.

And out from her presence had just passed the man to whom her whole existence was one long ingratitude.

‘Have I deserved to be what I am,’ she thought. ‘Have I not been base,—base,—base!’

And she knew herself to be so.

All her life, since the time that she had voluntarily gone from him, had been one long crime against him. She knew it whenever she paused to think; but thought had so little place in her shadowless life.

All things had gone well with this fairest daughter of Hazard. Accident, which seemed her progenitor, had been ever her protector. Fortune and all its chances had been gracious to her.

She had left her early life as far behind her as the beautiful, glittering, ephemeral-winged insect of a tropic summer, leaves its larvæ bed in the closed cup of a poppy or a lotus, as it wings its way high into air and sunlight. That she—she so great, so worshipped, so irresponsible, so widely courted, so habituated to idolatry and power and all the ways of wealth, could ever have been that Waif and Stray whereof he spoke, seemed as impossible to her as it is to the full-plumed aphid glancing in the sun to recall the season of its chrysalis-slumber.

She!—the most beautiful woman of her world and of her age,—had once been that foundling child, reared by a peasant, succoured by a bohemian, dwelling under a cottage roof, and made happy by a gleaner's treasury of scattered corn stalks, by a peasant's gold of honey and yellow gourds, by an infant's jewel-store of morning dew-drops and of blue forget-me-nots!

It was bitter to her to think it; to have the memory of it forced upon her; and she paced to and fro the length of her chamber with restless, uneven steps as she remembered that, thrust this fact away far down into oblivion as she would, the fact still lived, and could not be destroyed:—with all her wealth, with all her empire, this fact was stronger than herself, and could not be abolished by her will.

It was the one canker in her ever-blossoming roses; the one ghost within her joyous palaces; the one bitter drop in her wine-cup's ruby light.

The canker was at her heart, the ghost within her walls, the bitterness upon her lips, in this moment when the odour of the snow-born flowers wafted the memories of her buried childhood to her.

Life had been so fair to her. The years had gone by in one continual blaze of triumph, in one continual hymn of rejoicing. She was great; she was unrivalled; she was satiated with offered love.

What else could make the paradise of a woman? From the hour when she had cried, 'The fairies have remembered me at last!' the fairies had never again deserted her.

From the hour in which her selection had been made, all things had led her to her new existence, all things divorced her from her old; and no sigh for all she had abandoned ever grated on the ear of those who had made her what she had become.

The haughty temper and far-reaching vision of the aged aristocrat had environed with scrupulous care this child of Chance, in whom her prescience foresaw the future bearer of her name.

She had bent all her skill and all her energies to conceal from the world that the creature she adopted was the offspring of Hazard, nurtured on alms; and to make of her a woman so perfect that the most critical should discover no flaw in her grace or her beauty, in her acts or her thoughts. And she had been perfectly successful. Swiftly and easily all the precepts that an unyielding pride could teach, all the impress that an exquisite elegance could make, were stamped on the facile wax of a temperament already akin to them. To Viva, nothing of greatness seemed either new or strange. Rank was no King Cophetua to her, and she no beggar-maiden. She was only a long-dethroned princess, rightfully reinstated in her sovereignty. There was no need to dread her self-betrayal. She wore her purples as though

born to them ; and even her patrician instructress was compelled to murmur to herself, ' If a bastard—surely one of some imperial race, such as there sits not in these days on the fool-filled thrones of Europe ! '

Travel, culture, change of scene, learning made graceful and alluring, all that could be brought to the moulding of her mind and tastes were given her. She was kept in seclusion and in foreign countries some few years ; she was baptized by the church with a long bead-roll of saintly names, the priests not questioning their liberal patroness ; she was changed into that brilliant empress which education and wealth, and an artificial atmosphere, and all the pomps and graces of wealth, can make out of any lovely, vivacious, and impressionable child.

At times, even the cold, courtly, ever-sarcastic old woman, could have wished for a shade more warmth, a touch more earnestness, in this glittering volatile thing that radiated around her, and seemed never to be moved to any sense of debt or gratitude, but only to the buoyant exultant sense of victory and of fair fortune. But she wished for them in vain :—the only one who could have wakened them was banished.

And, unconsciously, in her sedulous destruction of that one pure, ardent, early tenderness in the young girl's heart, she shaped the weapons of her own son's martyrdom.

When at length the silent passion that he had struggled against so long as mere selfish and vain desire was conquered, and spoke, and offered all its matchless possessions, its magnificent gifts, they were accepted with the smiling indifference of a fair, pampered, ambitious creature, who conceived that the donation of her own loveliness balanced all debt between them, yet who, insecure in her singular fate, saw in this alliance the sole possible passage to the security of power.

‘I shall be the Duchess de Lirà!’ she thought, with a haughty smile; if she thought also with a shuddering sigh, ‘And I must be his Wife!’

The sudden illness and death of her protectress hastened this union to which she willingly consented, instinctively grasping the sole sceptre that was stretched out to her; only seeing the kingdom that lay before her of omnipotence and pleasure, and triumphant vanity, and sure deliverance from all future chance of obscurity or humiliation. The marriage sacrament was administered beside the death-bed of her husband’s mother, that no breath of slander, no rumour of injurious wonder, might ever touch the fame of the one who henceforth was to bear a title illustrious for centuries amongst the princes of the earth.

And the tidings, travelling far from the Austrian city where they tarried, went in the sweet spring evening to the house of Mère Rose.

Attained ambition on her lips was no Dead Sea fruit; but an enchanted apple, ever fresh, ruddy, luscious.

For her sake her lord went forth from the seclusion he had so long preserved, and even approached a Court, which he abhorred as the Court of an usurper, that he might show her to that 'great world' for which she so long had pined. She became, at once, the idol, the leader, the reigning beauty of her sphere.

Her husband, content only to minister to her wishes and her will, grew a slave to her idlest caprice, and was grateful for her slightest smile. For the second time an immeasurable devotion was laid subject to the rule of her mutable fancies; this time, yet more than the first, it utterly failed to move her to any sense of its priceless value, it was only regarded as a means to the end of her own gratification.

Intoxicated with homage, applause, indulgence, extravagance, pleasure, she did what to few is it given to do,—she realized her wildest dreams. She had but to wish, and she possessed. She had but to look, and she vanquished. Her conscience was stifled, her memory was killed, her heart never beat but with the throbs of vanity and triumph, love had no peril for her, for she had against it the shield of an all-absorbing self-love.

She lived as exclusively in the present, and as

absolutely for herself, as the brightest humming-bird that ever wantoned above roses.

She had once had purer visions: these had all perished. Her moral ruin was not less rapid and complete than were her social ascent and her absolute domination.

So she lived her life; and on the night of the Dorian ball her husband died, in silence and in solitude.

For the hour the impression which that death made on her was vivid, and her self-reproach poignant.

But then she was free,—absolutely free.

‘Light-wedded, and light-widow’d, and unaware of any sort of sorrow.’

She passed out once more, after the briefest retirement that custom could sanction, into the noon-day blaze of the world she had quitted, tenfold more potent now than ever; for now to the sorcery of her smile was added the sorcery of her gold, which men were also free to strive and win.

No living creature dreamed that in the great Duchess de Lirà there beat the same pulses that had throbbed in the young limbs of the Waif and Stray.

To keep her unseen until time and culture had so changed her, that there was no fear of her recognition by the keenest eyes that had ever beheld her, had been the first care of her powerful guardians.

Estmere, and the son of Estmere, she had never met ; and when one or two of the young nobles who had been at the banquet of Coriolis, and might have recalled some likeness in her to the child whom they had there beheld, their memories had been too filled with the fair forsaken faces of women for them to heed the resemblance, or to suspect the secret, of the one before whom they bowed so low in homage.

Vague mystic rumours did indeed float about concerning her : but the hand of her imperious protectress had been strong enough to lift her high above suspicion ; and many expedients had been found and used, with keenest tact, to supply all flaws, and smooth all strangeness, in her story.

Yet, although all others had so completely forgotten, she could not utterly forget ;—not utterly, with those white and purple flowers lying in her hands.

That time had been, when these things, and such things as these, gleaned from wood and pasture, had been her only treasures ; when she had owned no more home, or heritage, or food, by right, than such as the bird, forsaken of its flock, can make and find from tufts of grass, and pods of seeding flowers, and any wind-blown alms of nature. That time had been ; if she had kept its memory in her heart in gratitude, an amulet against all evil thoughts, a cross to recall to her all those who suffered, a rosary

whereby she had counted her faults, her follies, and her better deeds, it had been blessed to her.

As it was,—cast scornfully and cruelly aside, as some detested thing for which she prayed oblivion and annihilation,—it might some day rise up and have its vengeance on her.

And at rare times she feared this, with a fear wholly foreign to her high-couraged and imperious temperament.

The fear was kindred to that which will pursue and move a monarch, whose passage to his throne has been hewn with an iron blade through the granite of gigantic crime, and whose steps have waded through the blood of a murdered people to reach the diadem of his desire.

Was it not over the lifeless bodies of slaughtered loves that she, also, had passed to her victories, and to her kingdom?



## CHAPTER XIX.

**T**HAT night, at one of the greatest houses of Paris, the most exquisite woman of its courtly assembly bore in her hand a massive cluster of simple blue and white violets—violets, full of a wild forest fragrance, amidst the exotics blossoming there.

‘Are they for the sake of the Past, Madame?’ asked of her an old Marshal, whose youth had known Marengo and Jena, seeing in them the emblems of his Chief.

She turned her eyes on him with a look her lovers had never seen in them.

‘Yes! They are for the sake of the Past!’

Those around her wondered eagerly, and in surprise, what Past this could be of which a creature so young still and so eminent could think with such

regret; with her it could not be they knew a Buonapartist memory.

When she went forth to her carriage one watcher standing by, unseen, amongst the crowds, caught a glimpse of his violets in her clasp of jewelled gold. And summer dawns had not been sweeter to him than the bleak and stormy night became,—she had enough of the love of her childhood to treasure his flowers thus !

The remembrance of him, slight though it was, sufficed to send back warmth and gladness to his heart; he gave a world of tenderness, accounting it as nought,—he was touched to passionate thankfulness by this one trivial act.

Thus great natures ever give, and ever receive :—pouring out their gold like water, and into their garners receiving dross in exchange.

When her carriage had rolled away, he also left the gates, and went far away through the Quarter of St Martin, up towards the thieves' nest of Chaumont.

The thrill of joy which had quivered through him as he had seen the violets in her hand, and in her bosom, faded into the depression which ever follows a hope that is unutterably sweet, yet wholly baseless, and which springs up only to perish in all the glory, and all the fragility, of the evanescent flower that only blooms for a single day.

She remembered him, and her childhood,—that

was something. But she was divorced from him for ever; and could no more return to him than the fruit, gathered in for a prince's table, can return to the moss-covered branch, where once it hung in a country orchard.

He had known that this would be so; he had foreseen it as the inevitable sequel of that choice which had removed her to the world for which she had longed. Not now for the first hour was its truth before him. He had seen it with each time, through the many years of her separation from him, that he had looked upon her and had watched the actions of her life. But it had never struck on him so strongly or so vividly as when he had beheld her that morning; as when, in every gesture, and smile, and glance, in every languid movement, and contemptuous reply, and negligent grace, he had seen how wholly the gay, wayward, innocent, transparent child, that he once had sheltered, was lost in the patrician woman of the world.

He had kept aloof from her. It had been too keen a suffering for him to provoke it. He, who cast all pain from him on the impulse of a joyous nature as he would have cast an adder from his arm, could not voluntarily seek the torture that her presence was. He took heed that she was content; he assured himself that her own desires were the guide she followed; he kept vigil, how constant and how deeply penetrating she did not dream, over all the

changes of her life. But, once having seen that it was well with her, once having learned that in her servitude to ambition she only embraced the success that she craved, he sought her presence little.

During the years that her husband lived, she never saw the face of the man she had forsaken, though, once or twice, amidst deep garden ways in Italy, or on the waters of old Teutonic streams, she had heard—or had thought that she heard—the music that she had loved in the days of her childhood. And in such moments, under the spell of that sweet and distant melody, her eyes had filled with sudden tears, and her heart with sudden yearning, and the vague sense of a loss, irrevocable and endless, had come over her.

Their lives had drifted asunder, as two boats drift north and south on a river, the distance betwixt them growing longer and longer with each beat of the oars and each sigh of the tide. And for the lives that part thus, there is no re-union. One floats out to the open and sunlit sea; and one passes away to the grave of the stream. Meet again on the river they cannot.

His heart was weary as he went.

Could he have served her he had been content. But what need or what call for service could there be in this fate so royal, so shadowless, so eminent, so coldly and so radiantly clear? She had wealth, and had the world at her feet; she had empire, and

had no wish unfulfilled ; she had youth, and had all things that render youth glorious. What space in such a life was there for love to fill ? She had need of nothing. She had the armies that conquer, she had the sorcery that transmutes, she had the smile that makes fate smile back in answer. What appeal in such a life was there for aid or succour ?

Once he had promised her that though she should return to him sin-stained, wretched, broken-hearted, driven from every refuge, and shrinking from every glance, yet would he not forsake her, but would shelter her with his tenderness still. But a sterner trial than this tore the strength of his love at its roots. He had to stand outside the golden gates of her paradise,—forgotten.

Not rare on this earth is the love that cleaves to the thing it has cherished through guilt, and through wrong, and through misery. But rare, indeed, is the love that still lives whilst its portion is oblivion, and the thing which it has followed passes away out to a joy that it cannot share, to a light that it cannot behold.

For this is as the love of a god, which forsakes not, though its creatures revile, and blaspheme, and deride it.

His heart was weary within him as he went through the dreary way ; the night was bitter and full of storms. The snow-clouds hovered unbroken, but the wind was wild and chill as ice, and ever and

again a gust of rain swept with shrill passion over the half-frozen ground, and dulled the few lights burning.

He had come into the quarter of the poor, and into the hotbeds of crime, through the maze of crooked streets and swarming tenements that were alive with guilt as an ant-hill with its insect-swarm, whilst, furthermost, the cavernous rocks of Chaumont sheltered every sin and every lust in their recesses. It was ever thus that he exorcised his dark hours. Yet, to-night, the heart-sickness of every poet and every leader of the world was on him, too heavily for even the justice of truth, or the purity of labour, to have worth in his sight.

‘What avail?’ he thought. ‘What avail to strive to bring men nearer to the right? They love their darkness best,—why not leave them to it? Age after age the few cast away their lives striving to raise and to ransom the many. What use! Juvenal scourged Rome;—and the same vices that his stripes lashed then, laugh triumphant in Paris to-day! The satirist, and the poet, and the prophet strain their voices in vain as the crowds rush on;—they are drowned in the chorus of mad sins and sweet falsehoods! Oh God! the waste of hope, the waste of travail, the waste of pure desire, the waste of high ambitions!—nothing endures but the well-spring of lies that ever rises afresh, and the bay-tree of sin that is green, and stately, and deathless!’

Yet—though in that hour he saw the vanity of labour, the futility of effort, the helplessness of truth against the massed evils and armoured insincerities of the world, as men in their hours of loneliness must ever behold them,—yet, he went onward into the Gehenna whither his steps tended.

Above, and hidden in the huge dens of the rocks, assassins, and brigands, and ravishers, brooded and glutted over their golden spoil or their writhing prey; and in the horrible streets that lay below, naked children and half-naked women fought and tore at each other like mad dogs, songs of riotous blasphemy were crossed by the din of drunken combatants, and hideous misery with hideous obscenity struggled which should be king regnant there.

The rocks towered up against the black starless skies, silent because, screened in their caverns, men, who had changed to devils, hoarded stolen treasure, and stifled tell-tale shrieks, and crushed out panting life all noiselessly, and strove to find some new variety of lust. But in the quarter of the town beneath them there was a loud tumultuous hell, in which sex and age were alike forgotten, and confounded in one pit of shameless shame:—a pit where human lives were pent together in gasping droves, as if they had lost all semblance of humanity; where one vast cauldron of iniquity seethed on and on for ever, for ever fed afresh.

It is in such social bodies as these that the cancer of the world throbs, and poisons all that it infects, and taints even that which is in health—a cancer whose sole attempted cure is now and then a random cut from the knife of civil power, that leaves it wider spread than ever, covered, insidious, deadly with the germs of an eternal death.

As the imprecations, the screams, the yells, the laughter worse than any curses, the songs that had so utter a depravity in them, the cries of young children under brutal blows, beat on his ear where he approached Chaumont, a great softness, a great pity came into his eyes.

‘God-forgotten, they call you!’ he murmured. ‘Rather man-forsaken.’

He was unarmed; he penetrated into a quarter where death waited for any honest man who durst venture his life there; he came amongst ravening wolves, to whom murder was pastime, and cruelty joy. But he walked on, with the careless courage of his nature. Fear was as far from him as from any eagle of the Engadine; and, moreover, these wolves were as faithful dogs to him, caressing his hand where they bit through to the bone of every other. To him they were tame, and were loyal. He lashed them with scorn; he scourged them with reproach; many a time he seized their prey from out their very jaws; he stood between them and

their passions ; and he braved them openly in their maddest rage. But they never lifted their weapons against him, and in their most furious moods he was sacred to them. They knew well that there was love and not hate in his soul ; and they unconsciously revered what they could not comprehend,—this courage which only feared sin, this pity which could embrace even guilt, this manhood that had every strength, and boldness, and liberty that they honoured, and yet was so pure from crime, and so stainless from shame.

He knew that he was safe amidst them. Had he not known it he would have gone thither just the same. It was not in his blood to study caution, or dread peril ; many a time, with his back against a wall and the haft of a knife against his chest, he had kept a score of desperate brutes at bay, refusing to relinquish them their victim. And he who loved sunlight, and mirth, and the smile in women's eyes, and the gay recklessness of artist life, and the beauty of a summer world, came into the hells of great cities on that simple, unflinching duty to humanity, which was a law the bohemian and the wanderer never broke. Those whom the world cast out he made his brethren ; and, if once in a thousand times of trial it was given him to raise a sinking soul from the abyss, into the purer upper air of earth, he was content ; he earned the only wage he asked.

‘ They shudder when they read of the Huns and the Ostrogoths pouring down into Rome,’ he mused, as he passed towards the pandemonium. ‘ They keep a horde, as savage, imprisoned in their midst, buried in the very core of their capitals, side by side with their churches and palaces, and never remember the earthquake that would overwhelm them if once the pent volcano burst, if once the black mass covered below took flame and broke to the surface ! Statesmen multiply their prisons, and strengthen their laws against the crime that is done—and they never take the canker out of the bud, they never save the young child from pollution. Their political economy never studies prevention ; it never cleanses the sewers, it only curses the fever-stricken ! ’

A hideous clangour broke in on his ear as he went, lost in thought, and unheeding the din that he knew so well, worse than the roar of a million wild beasts. This clamour was shriller, viler, more horrible than common ; it caught his attention, and, lifting his head, he saw at some little distance a red, resinous glare.

‘ Murder is being done ; they are never so joyous over aught else,’ he muttered, as he hastened his steps. He was no optimist to deem his wolves slandered sheep ; he knew them as they were, in all their blackest, hardest, most hopeless guilt.

He soon came within sight of the fire ; a bonfire

blazing in a pent dark court, and throwing its glow on the rocks beyond; while about it hundreds of living creatures swarmed, and shrieked, and sang, and raved, and danced in a saturnalia of devils' joy. A rabble of brigands with bare chests and great arms black with filth, of women dishevelled, unclothed, yelling like furies, of gaunt beggars with their filthy rags flying in the wind, and their long lean knives glancing in the air, of children leaping and screaming with delight, surrounded the pile of blazing wood that burned only the fiercer for the falling hail that hissed in its smoke. And above it, hung there to consume by slow degrees, suspended by an iron chain knotted about his waist, and fastened to an iron spout in a wall, swaying in the wind, and uttering awful cries, swung a living human figure.

This was the bacchanalia they enjoyed in the bitter wintry night.

'Ah-ah! How bright he will burn!' screamed a little five-year child dancing in ecstasy at the finest firework she had ever beheld.

Tricotrin gave a glance at the blackened form, as its chain halter cracked and shook in the wind: then threw himself with a leap like a stag's amongst the throng, seized a knife from the hand of a boy ere the lad could resist, sprang on to a broad stone coping on the wall, stretched up, seized the wretch by his waist-chain, cut the cord that knotted the

iron links to the projecting spout, and dragged him down on to the ledge where he himself stood. All was done in an instant ere they knew what he did : they were silent in supreme amaze.

Then a roar broke from all the crowd as with one voice ; a roar like a herd of hyænas cheated of their carcase-prey ; they loved him in their own fashion, but they loved slaughter more, and they hungered fiercely for that splendid human bonfire.

‘ Give him to us ! ’ they yelled, while twice a hundred knives glittered in the glare.

He stood above them, on the stone, above the stifling, resinous, scorching pyramid of flame : the creature he had rescued lying at his feet. All his life and ardour had flashed back into his face with the need of action ; his eyes blazed with scorn and passion ; his white abundant hair blew backward in the wind ; his fearless gaze unflinching met the glare of the upturned, bloodshot, thirsty eyes.

‘ Give him to you ! ’ he echoed in their own parlance, which he spoke with rapidity and ease. ‘ Am I vile as yourselves, think you ? What was his offence ? ’

The rush of thundering voices hissed out, as with a single breath, the story of the criminal ; a new comrade, a puny creature, stealthy as the cat, timid as the hare, who had joined them for awhile only to spy on them and to betray them to the law : a traitor

that deserved ten thousand deaths drawn out in years of torture.

Tricotrin heard; the red light full upon him as he looked down on the riot that seethed beneath him, and on the knives that menaced him if he did not yield.

‘A dark guilt, truly,’ he said with brevity, as his mellow voice rang clear through the din. ‘But *you* are not fit for its judges. Fine fellows indeed to sit in the judgment-seat—you who would be shot or be guillotined every one of you if you but had your deserts. What do you call yourselves? devils, tigers, or men? You have no claim to the last name! A spy is a thing as foul as a viper, I grant; but not to be burnt alive for all that, and you are too utter blackguards yourselves to have any right left in you to punish. Two hundred men, too, against one—glorious equality! For shame, you hellhounds; I knew you were brutes when the bloodthirst was on you, but I did not guess till now you were cowards!’

He knew how to deal with them,—as Dumouriez dealt with his mutinous battalions. The fiery scorn, the contemptuous invective, the dauntless censure struck them dumb, where other words would have excited their mockery, or inflamed their passions. The silence did not last long; they were in furious hatred of their prey, they were in ravening longing for their sport; they closed nearer and nearer,

stretching out their gaunt hands to seize, and lifting their knives in air.

‘Give him to us!’ they shouted again, with awful blasphemy upon their tongues. Any other than himself they would have hurled down and torn in pieces, as hounds tear offal.

He laughed aloud; with haughty defiance flashing on them from his eyes.

‘Give him to you? You think I am a huntsman to fling the fox to the pack? Off, you scoundrels!—sheath your knives, I tell you; do you hear? You want my life?—I dare say! You are murderers, and that is your trade. But I do not mean to die in your hell: I should find no worse where devils rage, if the priests’ tales be ever so true. This man shall be mine. I say it. You know I never break my word.’

The tumult raged higher and higher, swelling out like the hoarse roar of the sea.

‘Give him to us!’ they screamed. ‘The fires shall have him and not you!’

He stood unmoved; a brawny giant flung himself across the flames, leaped up by the stone ledges, and made a lunge at the body of the spy. But Tricotrin was too rapid for him; he dealt the brigand one blow, straight in his chest, and the man fell like an ox under the pole-axe.

There was a moment’s pause of stupefaction; they were superstitious of his power, they endowed

him with more than mortal force. But the women, ever foremost in cruelty and riot, ever hounding on to war the men who might choose peace, mocked and mouthed at their males for cowardice, and yelled with shrillest oaths their horrible cry.

‘Give him to the flames! His blood or yours!’

He looked with changeless calm upon them still; the hot flickering glare of the fire lighting up the majestic height of his stature, and the dauntless scornful grandeur of his face, on which there stole a certain wistful saddened pity.

He had thought that these brutes loved him.

‘Poor mad wild beasts!’ he murmured. ‘You know not what it is you do. You can kill me, doubtless, if you will; but you cannot make me look on to see you steep yourselves in slaughter.’

The roar hushed, like the roar of sea waves sinking down into calm: silence fell on them with a great and sudden awe. A sublimity that their minds could not reach, stirred their souls, from this serene courage, this offered sacrifice, this refusal to forsake them though they forsook themselves. A gaunt, bull-throated, sanguinary brigand,—type of the Populace of all time, from the mobs of Marius to the mobs of Marat,—thrust his knife down into his girdle with a curse.

‘Let him have his way! He may put a pike through me and I will not say him no.’

There was a throb of human blood under the

bullock-hide, there was a pulse of manly softness under the wolf-skin. He was a butcher of men ; he had drawn his knife across more than one panting throat ; he lived by riot and pillage ; but his temper answered to courage, and he had an instinct that revered greatness.

He was the leader amongst them, whose word was law, and whose argument with rebels was a rope : the crowd dared not revolt by more than a sullen savage groan. Tricotrin flung his bright glance over them.

‘ Patron Mi-Minoux, that was generously spoken. You give me this man ? ’

A roar of baffled rage broke from the throng, in which the loudest voices that led were the voices of women. But Mi-Minoux stayed it with a gesture.

‘ A thousand devils seize you ! He deserves more than this from us,’ he shouted. ‘ Tricotrin—take the damned beast’s life ; for your sake I say, not his, the hound ! ’

‘ For mine—and for your own.’

He stretched out his hand to Mi-Minoux ; the soiless hand that had never been stained with bribe or blood, or even the insincerity of a false greeting, meeting the one that was black with a thousand crimes, and red from murder’s work. Over the Patron’s dusky brutal face a tremor and a light passed quickly ; he drew his own hand away as though it were burnt with fire.

‘Hell and fury! *Mine* is not fit!’

Tricotrin looked on him with the smile that had such infinite pity.

‘Chut! Why not? We are both men?’

Then, standing still on the stone ledge with the drooping huddled figure of the spy lying in a shapeless mass at his feet, while the bonfire burned dully in the rushing hail, while the flames and the wind sank together, and the people grew very quiet, hushing the children who cried aloud for the spectacle they had lost, his voice rang, clear and sweet as a bell, through the thieves’ quarter,—

‘Children! You give me, to-night, gifts more precious than silver and gold. I thank you from my soul. I would not barter this single life that you spare to me—vile though it be—for all the coins of monarchs’ treasuries. You were wild beasts when I found you. Nay! a millionfold worse. For the beasts do but slaughter for hunger, as we kill the calf and the lamb; and the beasts never slay their own kind. You were worse than the tigers are; but still—my tigers were human. They let go their prey out of love for me. Ah! Why will ye not have as much love for yourselves? You are fools, though you deem yourselves wise: fools in the election of Crime for your god. Does that god bring you aught but blows? Will he feed you with aught but ashes? Will he clothe you with aught but fear, and shame, and fever, and fire? Ye are

fools in the god that ye serve. Ye are slaves, though ye deem yourselves free. What life does your deity give ? To tear like wolves ; to burrow like moles ; to be hunted like foxes ; to be shunned like lepers ; to endure months of famine for sake of one hour's gorged and loathsome debauch, like the vultures that only find sweetness in carrion. To be netted at last like a fox in a gin ; to have your limbs cramped in irons ; to be fettered, scourged, shaven, yoked together like coupled hounds ; working like the mill-horses for no reward in one endless circle ; sleeping on a plank, growing old in a cell, without the chance of a hope, without a woman's kiss, or a man's laugh, without a draught of wine, or an hour of liberty :—that is the life your god gives you ! That is the fate you deem freedom ! How long will you worship so blindly ?—so long as you are born in darkness ; so long as you are begotten and bred and reared in ignorance and iniquity. You lay your children, new-born, in the red iron hands of your Moloch. You fill their mouths with curses ere yet their milk-teeth are shed. You snatch them from their mothers to send them out to your god's hideous service. You give them life, only that you may cause to be brought forth fresh spawn of sin to curse the world that you hate. You bring the young children your women have borne to see a man burn for their sport : if they kill you when you are old, and useless, and cumber their path, will it be

the children's fault or your own? Slaves yourselves, why will you bring the new lives into bondage ere yet they can tell what the liberty of innocence means? Fooled serfs of a false god, whom you worship because his altars glitter with the tinsel of vice, why will ye bind your offspring down beneath the tyranny of your vile religion? You think I use language too harsh? Oh my people! You would have taken my life, a moment since, because I would not stand by to see you steeped afresh in blood; will you never believe how gladly I would lay it down for you if it would ransom you from suffering and sin?'

They were silent as they heard.

The passionate eloquence of the poet, winged with living truth, pierced their souls as he spoke to them. Vaguely the meaning and the greatness of his words reached the dullest and vilest life that cowered there. Women, sexless and shameful, shuddered and beat their breasts that had nourished thieves, and cursed aloud their lips that had rewarded murderers with kisses sold for stolen gold. Men, dogged and brutal, dropped down their heads, and shivered where they stood, and wondered in their poor untutored brains, that struggled against such mists of poisoned ignorance, whether indeed he who arraigned them thus were man or god.

It was only the little children, crouching beneath

the flame pillars of the fire, who murmured in their baby-throats against him, because he had cheated them of the burning, and had not let them hear the music of the death-shriek.

He heard, and stooped, and raised up one of those who muttered in lisping revolt against him. The child was of a few years old; but from out its elfin eyes the thirst of inherited lust already glistened, and on its parching mouth the heat of the drunkard's desire was already set.

‘Look!’ he said to the silent people, while his eyes rested on them with a regard of tenderness and of compassion unutterable. ‘The child hungers for the sight of a death agony:—your blood is in his veins, and he can have no choice but to be vile, for have you not made his pastime murder, and his cradle-song a curse? You have created him only to slay him,—are not the beasts of the deserts holy and full of mercy beside you? Women—as these creatures come to the birth, it were better to tear them from your breasts, and dash their brains out upon the stones of your streets, than have them become like this. He is not a child—this thing that clamours to see a living creature burn. He is a budding seed of awful crime, to which your passions have dared to give the breath and the force of life. And through him your sin will pass down through generation after generation. Have you ever thought what it is that you do when you beget, and bring

forth, these lives that grow up, like rank grass, from corruption ? ’

The great multitude was silent ; even the hellish creature that had mouthed and mocked at his feet, was quiet and touched with awe, not knowing the meaning of the words, but moved, unwittingly, by the solemn and dread sweetness of the voice above him.

Through the mob of murderers, and ravishers, and thieves, and forgers, a shiver ran like one deep sob.

Without another word he went down from the stones where he stood, and passed away through their midst, leading the condemned with him.

END OF VOL. II.

---

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.



---

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.



